

# Solidarity

## & Workers' Liberty



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an injury to one is an injury to all

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## The government controls the banks, but who controls the government?

# WE NEED A WORKERS' GOVERNMENT

**"T**he markets rule the world. Maybe that's why your conspiracy theorists make up all those crazy things. Because the truth is so much more frightening..."

So a top US businessman told the journalist Jon Ronson for his book *Adventures with Extremists*. It was a frightening truth like death is frightening — something scary that was, however, the way the world had to be.

Anything less than free-fire for "the markets", would spell stagnation and collapse. So they said.

Now it turns out that "the markets" themselves

bring collapse and stagnation. That they are human creations, and perverse human creations at that — a system by which, as Karl Marx put it, "a definite social relation between people assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things".

Now, in Marx's words again, "the dealers by whose agency circulation is effected, shudder before the impenetrable mystery in which their own economic relations are involved".

Those who once said loudest that the markets must rule, now accept the case which socialists made all along, that social regulation is indispensable for a modern, large-scale economy, in

which production and trade are organised on a vast social scale. Only they want that social regulation only in their interests, only for as long as they need it to dig them out of their hole. Then they want to go back to "the markets rule".

Why return to that recipe for suffering and chaos? Why gear social regulation to the interests of the wealthy? Why let the same people run that social regulation who previously obstructed it?

We need social regulation — but by a workers' government, based on, loyal to, and accountable to the working-class majority. The workers' movement must rouse itself to fight for a workers' government.

## CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

# Government cops out on smacking

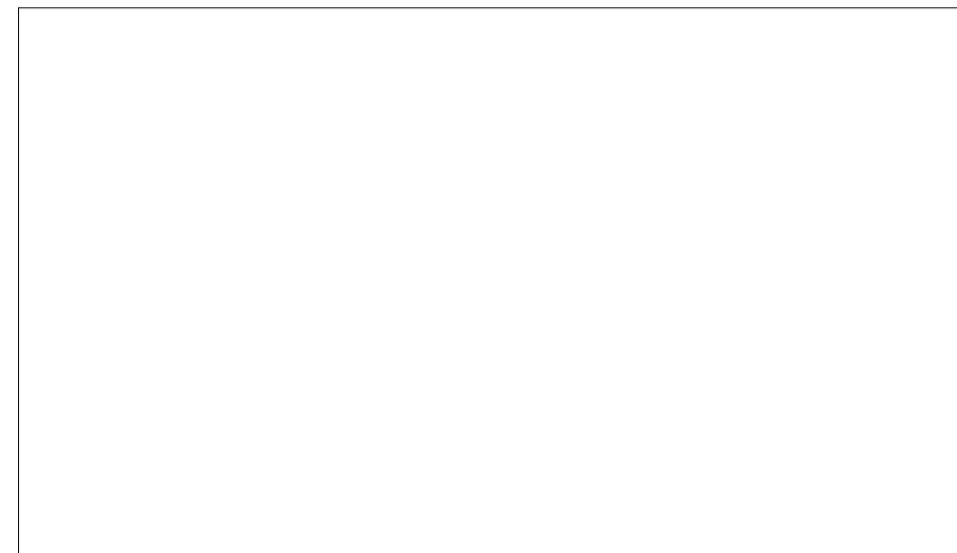
BY CATHY NUGENT

**A** smack is parents trying to hit you, [but] instead of calling [it] a hit they call it a smack." — A seven year old (from *It Hurts You Inside*, Children's Rights Alliance)

A proposed amendment to the Children and Young Person's Bill, which would have outlawed the physical punishment of children, will not now be discussed or voted on in Parliament.

The time allotted to that discussion was reallocated to Alistair Darling's announcement on bailing out banks with billions of pounds. The amendment — backed by 100 Labour MPs but not supported by the government — would have cost nothing. It would have simply have given children the same protection as adults against assault.

Why does the government want to keep the illogical and regressive law it passed in 2006 — one which justifies assaulting people who are least able to defend themselves, as "long as it does not leave a red mark or bruise". Are chil-

**Learning from mum and dad**

dren not people? Didn't Gordon Brown say his own children were "people not props"? Perhaps there is one law for the children of Ministers and another for other peoples' children.

The Children's Minister Beverley Hughes gave the game away when she defended the government's current law. She said: "We do not encourage or condone smacking [so why not repeal the

2006 law?] and we do not believe that it is the best means of controlling children's behaviour." For Hughes, whatever her personal view on smacking, the child is still there to be "controlled", marshalled into correctness. She will be thinking of the various ways that children and young people, invariably proletarian children, are "controlled" with high-pitched whistling noises built especially to ward off teenagers from shops, with curfews and with ASBOs.

Children need to be positively guided and encouraged into becoming more sociable and responsible as they mature. Other than physical hurt, all physical punishment achieves is humiliation and fear. The ability to reason and empathise with others are skills which come slowly to all human beings. There are no short cuts. Clearly Beverly Hughes still lacks some of those skills.

In most other places in Europe there are laws giving children the same right as adults: the right not to be hit. Not so in "modern" New Labour Britain. It is a disgrace.

## SEX WORK

## Government clampdown will endanger women

BY FEMINIST FIGHTBACK

**L**ast month Jacqui Smith announced at the Labour Party Conference that from October the government will be taking steps to clamp down on the sex industry in the UK. The new measures will give police new powers to prosecute those paying for sex, to shut down "brothels" and force sex workers into compulsory rehabilitation.

She announced that the government would "start work to outlaw paying for sex with someone forced into prostitution at another's will, or controlled for another's gain".

Of course, Feminist Fightback and sex workers' rights activists also object to coerced labour and coerced sex, whether in the sex industry or otherwise. But Feminist Fightback views these proposals as an attack on the rights and safety of sex workers.

Criminalising the clients of sex workers is dangerous for sex workers themselves. It means that male, female and trans-sex workers are forced underground and into clandestine work. This results in more reliance on third parties in order to arrange work, giving such third parties greater power, control and ability to exploit workers, reducing their safety and independence.

For street sex workers, already the most vulnerable group of sex workers, it can have even more serious consequences. Women are forced to take more risks. They have less time to decide whether or not to get into cars, are forced to work alone rather than in pairs or small groups and pushed into darker more isolated areas. Just two years ago in Ipswich we all witnessed the tragic consequences of zero tolerance policies on sex work.

Clients are an important source of information about exploitation and trafficking. The Poppy Project — a Home

Office organisation working with victims of trafficking — estimate that 2% of their referrals come from clients. By criminalising clients further, this important source of ensuring safety for victims of trafficking comes under attack.

The Home Secretary further stated that, as part of the new policy, labour would "give councils and the police new powers to close down brothels and clamp down on exploitation". There is extensive academic research that indicates that indoor sex work is much safer than selling sex outdoors. Current legislation states that more than one woman working in a property constitutes a brothel. Clamping down on "brothels" will often attack women working independently in a safer environment where they are in control of their work and working safely.

There are many reasons that women choose to work in the sex industry. Often because women's work is underpaid and undervalued, sometimes because it is the best possible alternative in a limited scope of choices or because it allows freedom and independence relative to other jobs available. Frequently it is a combination of these. Pushing sex work underground endangers all sex workers and obscures from view the very women these policies profess to help.

These measures are not about protecting women. They are likely to have the opposite effect. They are however wholly in line with a history of attempts to regulate sex workers' bodies and women's sexuality more generally. They avoid difficult questions about why, in a world of huge global disparities of wealth, women may come to the UK to work in sex work and how current immigration and border controls surrender some sex workers, and workers in many other industries, to exploitative and dangerous working practices.

• [www.feministfightback.org.uk](http://www.feministfightback.org.uk)

## DE MENEZES INQUEST

## Why no accountability?

BY DARREN BEDFORD

**A**nyone who has ever taken part in direct action will have some first-hand experience of why the police force exists. Liberals and right-wingers may argue that battering Climate Camp activists or striking miners over the head with truncheons are unfortunate anomalies; stopping old people from being mugged is the real essence of the role of the police.

The reality is precisely the other way around; the police force fundamentally exists to defend, violently if necessary, the interests of the ruling-class; and any useful community defence function it may play is almost a by-product.

The thoroughly undemocratic and entirely unaccountable nature of the police force also very clearly undermines the idea that the police act in "our" interests; we know what our interests are, so where are the channels by which we can instruct and control the police to act in them? The nature of the police as an undemocratic, armed wing of the capitalist state is exposed clearly in the shameful saga of Jean Charles De Menezes — the Brazilian man who was gunned down at close range by armed officers because they thought he was a terrorist.

Even allowing for the heightened tension following the 7/7 London bombings, and even allowing that the Metropolitan Police had evidence that suspected suicide bomber Hussein Osman (who had been involved in a failed attack the day before De Menezes was killed) was in the area in which De Menezes was spotted, the manner of the killing — up to a dozen close range shots with ammunition forbidden in actual warfare by international law! — indicate an obscene level of brutality and expose the "shoot first, ask questions later" ethos at the heart of capitalist "justice".

Even though it has been three years

since Menezes's murder, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) only recently opened an investigation into the case. The investigation has already exposed shocking cover-ups within the police, including the admission by one surveillance officer that he tampered with evidence dealt with earlier in the inquest, deleting the record of Deputy Assistant Commissioner Cressida Dick's note that De Menezes should be allowed to run onto the tube as he "wasn't carrying anything".

Now, in the middle of the inquest, Met Police Commissioner Ian Blair has resigned. Good riddance, but if the police really were a public body acting in the public interest, why isn't Blair, for instance, elected, or appointed by an elected, accountable authority, and why can he be sacked by that same democratic control at any time? Why couldn't he have been booted out in the immediate aftermath of the De Menezes killing?

Because, simply, the police does not belong to us. It is part of the armed wing of the capitalist state. To demand the "abolition" of the police as an immediate step would be to get well ahead of ourselves, but the De Menezes case shows us very clearly the need to maintain constant hostility, distrust and opposition to the bosses' state and its militias; the army, the air force, the navy and the police.

## OUR RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

# For a workers' government!

*Freedom of competition changes into its very opposite — into monopoly... The official representative of capitalist society — the state — will ultimately have to undertake the direction of production. This necessity for conversion into state property is felt first in the great institutions for intercourse and communication — the post office, the telegraphs, the railways... The transformation — either into joint-stock companies and trusts, or into state-ownership — does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces... The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine — the state of the capitalists...*

*The workers remain wage-workers — proletarians. The capitalist relation is not done away with... The exploitation is so palpable, that it must break down. No nation will put up with production conducted by trusts [conglomerates], with so barefaced an exploitation of the community by a small band of dividend-mongers... The capitalist mode of production, by transforming the great majority of the population into proletarians, creates the power which, under penalty of its own destruction, is forced to accomplish this revolution... The new productive forces have already outgrown the capitalistic mode of using them. And this conflict between productive forces and modes of production... exists... objectively, outside us, independently of the will and actions even of the men that have brought it on... Modern socialism is nothing but the reflex, in thought, of this conflict in fact; its ideal reflection in the minds, first, of the class directly suffering under it, the working class.*

*The proletariat seizes the public power, and by means of this transforms the socialised means of production... into public property... To accomplish this act of universal emancipation is the historical mission of the modern proletariat. To thoroughly comprehend the historical conditions... to impart to the oppressed proletarian class a full knowledge of the conditions and of the meaning of the momentous act it is called upon to accomplish — this is the task of the theoretical expression of the proletarian movement, scientific socialism.*

Friedrich Engels

Governments all over the world continue to act as if they wish to point the way forward for humankind. As if they deliberately act to prove to working people everywhere that socialism is both urgently necessary and long overdue.

In many of the advanced countries of capitalism, the governments that act for the bourgeoisie have nationalised banks, in whole or in part! They are being compelled to substitute themselves, and the financial resources of society, for the free play of a key section of the capitalist class.

Republican party leaders in the USA voice their unhappiness at the "socialism" of what the Republican President Bush is doing. But they conclude their public soliloquies with statements that There Is No Alternative except for the US bourgeoisie to grit their teeth and be grateful for the "boldness" of the US government in temporarily embracing "socialism".

For two decades and more, the champions and defenders of capitalism have erected their case on the assertion that There Is No Alternative to capitalism; now, they say There Is No Alternative (temporarily!) to socialism, or what they understand as "socialism"!

It is of course not socialism as we hold to it, working-class democratic socialism, but it is "socialism", in the primitive sense of the substitution of social, government, activity for that of the private capitalists.

The ex-reform-socialist advocates of the "social market" have a chance to see — though most of them won't — the emptiness of their glib civilised-capitalist formula, according to which the normal tendencies of a market system should shape fundamentals, moderated and palliated by "corrective" government action on welfare.

What is needed is not a "social market" system, in which the market rules with "social" modifications, but a system in which "society" rules and regulates and plans the economy on the large scale, "moderated" in certain areas by the empirical flexibility and responsiveness of markets.

In the decades of marketist delusion — of what might be called High Thatcherism, in Britain and even internationally — one all-limiting argument was the national governments had limited powers in the era of the global corporations. We are now seeing just how much power governments can exercise in an emergency.

They have had to take loosely coordinated action to scaffold-up the world financial system, but clearly gov-

## Depression in the 1930s US. Governments have always acted to rescue capitalism in a crisis.

ernments have great power still. It is a question of what that power is used for, and what governments think is an emergency — that is, of who does the thinking, the representatives of the bourgeoisie or of the working class. Of what sort of government is in power — a bourgeois government or a workers' government.

Government action to rescue stricken but essential elements of capitalism is not, of course, new. In the world wars, governments took directing control of national capitalist systems. The US government of President Wilson did it in World War One, and so did Roosevelt in World War Two. In Nazi Germany, the government took tight control of the economy during the war.

In Britain, after 1945, the government nationalised the capital-short and run-down coal and rail industries.

The workers, especially the miners, benefited from a more enlightened and less penny-pinching administration of their industry — but what the decrepit former owners got, by way of enormous "compensation", was their capital freed for more profitable reinvestment.

Whether or not the governments succeed in their aim of staving off financial collapse and limiting the economic depression that is now upon us, the "socialist" activity by governments run by the fiercest ideologues of "marketism" and red-in-tooth-and-claw capitalism — including the Brown-Blair government — is a stupendous inadvertent endorsement of the underlying case for working-class, Marxist, socialism.

And vindication too of the clear-sightedness of those who, through the capitalist-marketist delirium, which infected the labour movement too, insisted that capitalism is fundamentally at odds with human need, and that socialism is an irreplaceable necessity for humankind.

The big capitalist corporations go around the world looting and pillaging, casually dispossessing large numbers of workers of jobs when they can get a better rate of exploitation by employing other workers half a world away. The surreally-high salaries and hand-outs to their executives and dividends to their shareholders are only the most visible and obscene aspects of the piratical looting at the heart of global capitalism.

Capitalism is a system run and regulated by private owners, a system governed by drive for profit, and therefore erected on the basis of the exploitation of the working class.

The giganticism of the multinational corporations has not changed this, but emphasised and intensified and made unmistakably visible its fundamental traits.

But the fundamental reason why governments have had to act as they are acting, and what makes it possible for them to act this way to stave off financial disaster, is that capitalism is already "socialised" — concentrated and centrally administered. It has not therefore ceased to be capitalism.

That economy is already controlled and administered, for their own benefit, by a comparatively small group of capitalists, is an advanced manifestation of what Frederick Engels long ago described as the "invading socialist society", growing up within the shell of capitalism. The main processes of production and trade, though held and administered as private property and run for the owners' benefit to maximise profit, are already more or less socialised.

*Continued on page 6*

## Timeline of a crisis

**17 February:** UK government nationalises Northern Rock.

**11 July:** US government regulators seize control of mortgage company IndyMac.

**7 September:** US government nationalises the giant mortgage firms Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac,

**15 September:** One of New York's four big investment banks, Lehmann Brothers, goes bankrupt. Another, Merrill Lynch, is rescued by being taken over by Bank of America.

**17 September:** US government nationalises giant insurance company AIG. British government announces it will waive rules to aid takeover-rescue of HBOS by Lloyds TSB.

**19 September:** US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson puts together plan for \$700 billion government money to help out banks by buying up their dodgy financial assets.

**22 September:** Wall Street's last two independent investment banks, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley, change their legal status so they can do high street banking.

**26 September:** Washington Mutual bank collapses — the biggest corporate failure in US history.

**29 September:** UK government announces Bradford & Bingley bank is to be nationalised. US House of Representatives votes down Paulson's \$700 billion bailout plan.

Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxemburg come together to save the Fortis bank by partial state ownership.

**29 September:** Iceland nationalises Glitnir bank. German government bail out Hypo Real Estate, the second-largest commercial property lender in the country.

**30 September:** Irish government offers 100% state guarantee on bank deposits. Belgian, French, and Luxemburg governments announce joint bail-out of Dexia.

**3 October:** Revised \$700 billion bailout plan passes through House of Representatives. Netherlands government nationalises Dutch part of Fortis.

**8 October:** UK government announces £500 billion rescue package for banks, some of it to be used to buy part-ownership in them. Iceland's other two big banks, Landsbanki and Kaupthing, go bust. Icelandic internet bank Icesave announces it will block all withdrawals.

**9 October:** The International Monetary Fund announces emergency plans to bail out governments affected by the financial crisis.

**14 October:** UK government announces it will partly nationalise the Royal Bank of Scotland, HBOS and Lloyds TSB (buying shares, thus "recapitalising" the banks and becoming the biggest shareholder).

Eurozone countries say they will do similar with their banks.

## IN BRIEF

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT:** On 20 August and 24 September Scottish local government workers staged two successful 24-hour strikes demanding a 5% pay-rise or £1,000, whichever is the greater. The employers' improved offer was 2.5% rise this year.

The strikes were to have been followed up by longer selective action.

But on Thursday 2 October the employers came up with a new offer: a two-year deal, with a pay rise of 3% this year, and 2.5% next year. As the real rate of inflation is running at around 10% for the lowest paid workers, this deal amounts to a pay cut over two years.

But the offer was sufficient for the union leaders — in Unite, Unison and GMB — to justify calling off the planned selective strikes.

If the unions recommend acceptance, the result will be demoralisation. If they recommend rejection, then members will wonder why strike action has been called off in exchange for an unacceptable pay offer. Union activists need to campaign for rejection of the latest pay.

Unfortunately the left in Scotland in Unison, the largest local authority union, is divided over future strategy, with some calling for an escalation involving two-day and three-day all-out strike action in successive months, and others arguing there is not yet sufficient support for such an escalation. There are also differences of opinion about the organisation of emergency cover.

• Fuller report:  
[www.workersliberty.org/node/11392](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/11392)

**RAIL: 450 Scottish railway signal workers struck on 7 October, in response to the failure of Network Rail over the past two years to abide by agreements on rostering and transfers. A second strike planned for 9 October was called off after talks between the RMT union and Network Rail.**

Network Rail had been taking a hard line — setting up a “confidential helpline” to clarify matters for the supposedly confused RMT members who have been taken in by a “RMT spin machine.”

Given the length of time which Network Rail has played fast and loose with rostering agreements, it is all the more important that the dispute is not “settled” on the basis of some ACAS fudge but only with cast-iron guarantees that the company will adhere to current agreements.

**HIGHER EDUCATION:** On 7 October lecturers at Nottingham Trent University were joined by delegations from around England in a three hundred strong protest against attempts to de-recognise their union, the UCU.

On 4 October, following protracted negotiations, university managers unilaterally terminated the existing collective bargaining agreement they had with the UCU.

The protest took place outside Nottingham's Royal Centre, where student “freshers” were to be “welcomed” by Nottingham Trent Vice Chancellor Neil Gorman. Most students took leaflets and many expressed interest in perhaps the first such protest many will have seen. However, in a disgraceful attempt to obstruct lecturers speaking to students, apparatchiks from Trent's student union formed a human corridor through the protest, demanding that protesters “stop obstructing” passing students. How low can you go?!

This is a blatant attack on trade union freedom, a cynical move by an employer

## LONDON BUS STRIKES 10 AND 22 OCTOBER

## The members should control

FROM WORKERS' LIBERTY  
BUSWORKERS BULLETIN

**F**irst bus drivers started things off on 29 August 2008, having turned an uneven membership three years ago into a solid union across the garages. Metrobus drivers in Croydon, Orpington and Crawley joined for one day's action on the 12 September. On 10 October 2,500 drivers at Metroline went out too, voting 88.5% for strike, boosting the strikers to 6000.

Two years ago, drivers for Metroline took strike action against the second biggest transport transnational in the world. Their visibly scared, and in some ways corrupt, union leadership backed down — and drivers agreed to pocket far less than their due. The next year Metroline bosses were unusually quick to meet the union's (low) pay demands. The union, Unite, probably to help out Ken Livingstone, appeared to shelve all disputes on the London buses.

But for bus drivers around London, the Metroline strike was inspiring and seemed to prove strong strike action possible.

Under the slogan “equal pay for all”, Unite seems serious about fighting against the system of private companies out-tendering each other by under-cutting workers' wages and conditions. Arriva North and South and East Thames and East London should also be out on 22 October. Even at Transdev Sovereign, normally weak, there seems to have been a turnaround through concerted activist work.

Drivers are fed up of the injustice and craziness of the same work being paid thousands of pounds more or less depending on the company they work for. For other drivers, in Arriva Shires for example, rotas seem the biggest issue.

Some drivers think differently on whether “equal pay for all” should apply to bendy-bus rates and different shifts.

On First buses, one of the company negotiators has “resigned” and the com-

pany is determined not to give ground to the union. “The union is intent on dragging further bus companies into strikes in pursuit of its fruitless bid to standardise conditions of working and pay in all companies,” said Adrian Jones, managing director in London and Berkshire

Drivers have seen through the tricks management try to pull by manipulating the rotas — they can see that the companies do not give a penny without trying to claw it back at the same time. Offer after offer trying to test the resolve of the union has been rejected by drivers, who seem sure that they will go forward this time.

Many members have no idea what the union's plan is, or if there even is a plan. If there is a plan, it is decided above their heads and not communicated very well. Drivers are consulted (in general) to tell them what they need to do — which is important but far from what's needed to build a strong union that workers can trust. Nonetheless it is impressive how well-attended, strong and committed the pickets have been in all the garages so far. There have been small levels of scabbing, but the potential for a London-wide bus strike soon is there.

In garage after garage, new reps have been elected with a promise to fight, be accountable to members, and reject partnership with the companies — reps selling themselves over to the company's way of seeing things, becoming the com-

pany's person in the union.

Some drivers are dropping out of the union or going to the RMT, and this just at the point where union members across London are beginning to be more proactive and reps more accountable. These non-union and RMT members need to come back positively to Unite and be part of a struggle that should involve all drivers, actively making decisions and building the organisation.

Every member should develop a voice, an understanding and a stake in the decisions of the union. Transforming the bad days of corrupt unionism on the buses involves changing the culture of power in the union. Drivers are intelligent, thinking people, with ideas, experience, education and talents. Those with time should form a strike committee, networking ordinary members across the garages and companies, to steer the union leadership through the strike and organize maximum participation in the strike. Everyone should play their part. This would be a big and exciting challenge.

The union as a whole should facilitate everyone's participation by organising crèches, pooling care costs etc., to hold mass member meetings and protests on strike days.

The bus workers can shut down a huge circuit of London transport, and the most working-class mode of transport. They have immense power.

secretary election is in 2010, the right will probably coalesce around either North West Regional Secretary Kevin Coyne (ex Amicus) or his brother, the Midlands Regional Secretary, Gerrard Coyne (ex T&G).

The Amicus Unity Gazette and the T&G Broad Left are now meeting together at national and regional levels, and generally working together reasonably well. The ultra-loyal pro-Simpson grouping around Steve Davison has split from the Gazette and is rumoured to be in discussions with the ex-T&G group led by John Aitkin.

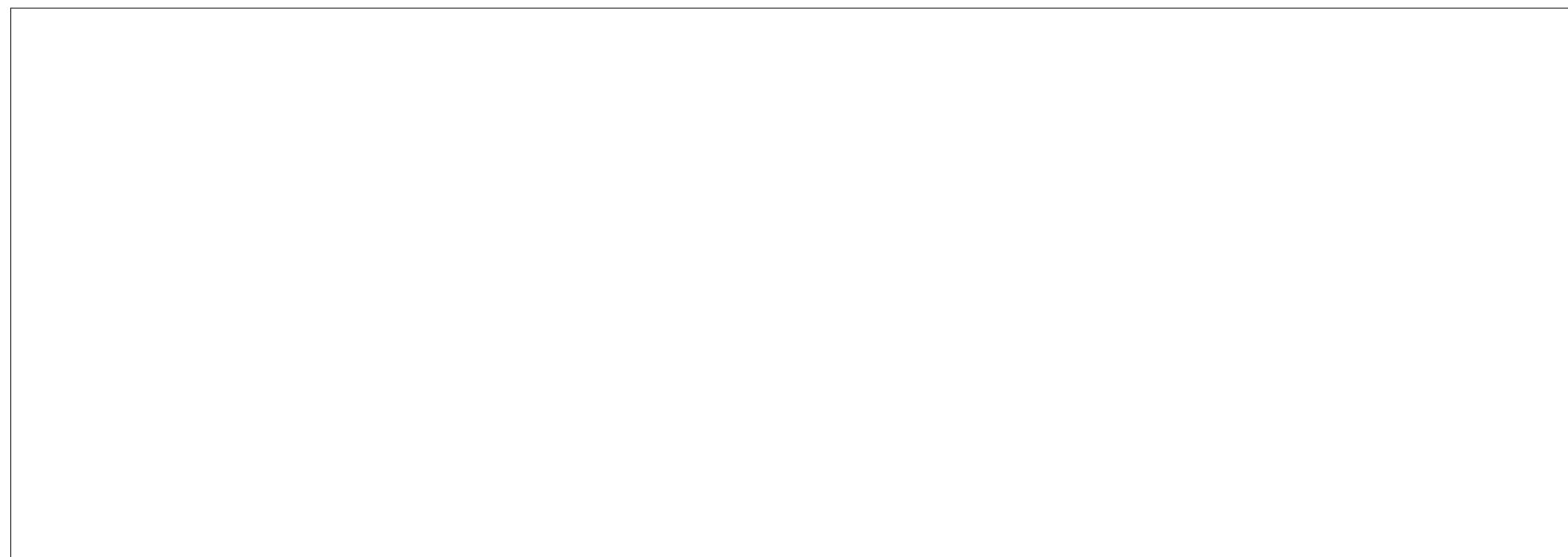
There will be a launch rally of the new, united Left group (no name yet) in Birmingham on Saturday 29 November.

## AWL Trade Union School

Saturday 25 October

11.30am, Oxford House, Derbyshire St, London E2

[www.workersliberty.org/tuschool](http://www.workersliberty.org/tuschool)



## FINANCIAL CRASH

# Questions and answers on the crisis

BY MARTIN THOMAS

**Q.** Governments are now going to part-nationalise their big banks, offer cash in return for the banks' dodgy assets, guarantee bank deposits, guarantee inter-bank loans, and promise not to let any big bank go bust. Will that fix the crisis?

A. In principle capitalist governments should be able to guarantee their domestic banking systems against collapse by sufficiently drastic measures of "bankers' socialism". Governments can always print money, so they can never be unable to pay their debts to people within the

same country.

However, at least four problems remains.

One: more drastic measures of "bankers' socialism" may prove necessary than announced so far.

Two: governments *can* become unable to pay their debts internationally, as Mexico and other Latin American states were in the early 1980s. A government may drive itself into international bankruptcy by big measures to save its banks from collapsing. Iceland seems near that point.

Three: some important governments can't print money, namely, those in the eurozone. The European Central Bank, which has some relative independence from all the governments, and certainly independence from the economically weaker states in the eurozone, controls the money supply. A eurozone state in severe difficulties may be pushed into quitting the eurozone.

Four: even if the credit crisis is stemmed by these government measures, its "fall-out" in production and trade remains to come.

**Q. Newspapers talked about the risk of a "collapse of the financial system". What would that mean?**

A. Banks becoming simply unable to lend. Big economies ending up something like Argentina in 1999, when financial crisis made the government ban all but very small withdrawals from bank accounts for a year. People had to get by for a year mainly with improvised currencies. Argentinian capitalism eventually revived, but only after huge chaos and losses.

**Q. Why shouldn't what the governments have already done be enough to stabilise the banking system? They've covered all the bases, haven't they?**

A. Possibly not. The problem is that there are vast masses of dodgy financial paper in circulation — sums far exceeding even the \$700 billion credit lifeline

that the US government has offered to its banks.

Take credit default swaps (CDS), for example. These are bits of paper which represent "insurance policies" which the buyer of other financial bits of paper (bonds, etc.) can buy to insure themselves against the seller of the bond (or whatever) defaulting on payments due. In 2001 there was a total value of \$919 billion outstanding in CDS. In 2007, \$62 trillion — nearly a hundred times as much as the \$700 billion lifeline.

But credit default swaps are traded. Bank A may have bought "insurance" from bank B, but in the meantime bank B has traded away the CDS — the income ("insurance premium") due on it, and the obligation to pay up if there's a default — to bank C. And then maybe bank C to bank D. Who knows what their "insurance" is worth now?

**Q. It's not fair, banks being bailed out. Shouldn't we demand that the governments bail out ordinary households instead?**

A. It isn't fair, but we need to change the system rather than just the bit of it being bailed out. Banks are more vital to the functioning of capitalism than households are. If you want a system where households are more important than banks, you can't just change government priorities within capitalism. You have to get rid of capitalism.

## MARXISTS AND THE CRISIS

**Q. What's the Marxist explanation of this crisis? How does it differ from what the papers say?**

A. Capitalism is all about rival capitalists competing ruthlessly to grab the biggest and quickest profit.

Capital is value in movement — value self-expanding over time. It belongs to the essence of capital that capitalists want to keep it moving as fast as possible, and to push the expansion of capital beyond the underlying limits of the market. If

## Learn more about the crisis...

Monday 20 October, and alternate Mondays after that: AWL study course on "Capitalist Crisis and Workers' Plan". 18:00 at the Camera Cafe, 44 Museum St, London WC1.  
[www.cameracafe.co.uk](http://www.cameracafe.co.uk)  
[www.workersliberty.org/crisis-course](http://www.workersliberty.org/crisis-course)

Thursday 23 October AWL London forum: Capitalist crisis: why it's happening, and how to respond. With Simon Mohun (Queen Mary University of London) and Martin Thomas (AWL) 7:45pm, Lucas Arms, 245A Grays Inn Road, London WC1

**John McDonnell MP: we have no say in this deal**

The government have come out with their statement, possibly the worst deal you could have, you shove in up to £50 billion... you get non-executive directors... we have no say whatsoever... this idea that they'll control bonuses on executive pay for a limited period of time; they're going to set up an arms-length body to monitor their investments... it's laughable.

It's called nationalisation, democratic representation on all the banks. But reform of the structures is irrelevant unless we can really transform our financial strategy... based on the needs of the people, for jobs, for homes, for alternative energy climate change and public services.

People are saying we've had enough, I'm being laid off, I've had enough, and I want to do something about it. The way we're treated as customers, as workers, as members of the community...

Individual struggles will break out and when those spontaneous activities break out we must try to use what consistent organisation we've got within our movement, which are the trade unions, to add force to those individual struggles and see how best to co-ordinate them.

## Mark Serwotka: time to rock the boat

I don't profess to be an economist but I do have some understanding of the effect of this crisis on working people.

The current crisis could be used to try and con working people into not resisting pay cuts and privatisation. I think we're going to see a real consensus of people in the political parties and I think some of the trade unions are going to tell people now's not the time to rock the boat and I take the view that now's the time to rock as hard as we can...

These are bizarre times... when I was leaving school, I remember reading all the left publications about nationalising the banks and the top 200 hundred companies, and now we have Bush and Brown seemingly nationalising the banks and some of the companies. If we look at America it's also bizarre. You could argue there has been more open debate in America under their political system about dealing with the crisis than in Britain, with the Bush bailout plan being rejected in Congress.

And when Brown says we will do whatever it takes to stabilise the banks, and do absolutely nothing to stop the poverty he is plunging public sector workers into, the hypocrisy is breathtaking, yet it seems to go unnoticed or uncommented upon; in that sense I see a huge opportunity but I also don't underestimate how big the problem is.

It raises the question about the whole political system, and the fact that no body speaks for working men and women in this place anymore as an organised party...

I've noticed we're not calling things nationalisation. We're calling this capitalisation... nationalising the risks not the profits. What are we going to get back in return for it? We need short term demands: controls on executive pay, not allowing people to have their houses repossessed.

We should take immediate steps to prevent off-shoring to avoid taxation — £25-40 billion leaving this country. If all this was collected tomorrow it would allow public sector workers in this country to have inflation proof pay rises and there still be £18 billion in change.

There is no better time than now to make alternative arguments, about the relevance of socialism. Challenge the ideology that says that only the private sector has the solution. That is a joke — the £79 billion market in public services. All that should stop now — argue for nationalisation of rail, of our utilities and public services that have been sold off.

Mark Serwotka is general secretary of

they have cash in hand, they seek to make the money "work for them" by putting it into the financial system to return, at least, a rate of interest. If they decide on new buildings or equipment or other assets, they don't wait until they have enough cash in hand, they borrow.

That produces an inherent drive for every boom to develop a credit "bubble" — every capitalist tries to "push the envelope".

### Q. I thought the Marxist theory of crisis was all about "the tendency of the rate of profit to fall".

A. No. In Marx's day it was accepted wisdom among economists that profit rates were tending to fall over time. Economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo had ideas to explain this tendency. (Later, John Maynard Keynes would have an explanation, too, similar to Smith's).

Marx rejected the theories of Smith and Ricardo, and in his manuscripts for volume 3 of *Capital* (which he never finished) sketched out an alternative scheme (much less mechanical, much more balanced with "counter-tendencies") of the presumed tendency to fall.

Whether his sketch was right, and whether the tendency actually exists long-term, are moot questions. In any case, in his sketch Marx made only a tentative suggestion as to why the tendency should produce crises. The presumed tendency does not figure at all in his most important writings on crisis.

The "tendency" became elevated to central status in a supposed "Marxist theory of crisis" only in Stalinist writings of the 1930s.

### Q. What is special about this crisis as

### distinct from other capitalist crises?

A. Many things. In particular, it is the nemesis of Thatcherism — or "neo-liberalism", or "economic rationalism", or "Reaganomics", as the same doctrines became known internationally: abolition of exchange controls, floating exchange rates, deregulation, privatisation, contracting out, union-bashing, and generally redefining the role of the government as to make it country into a suitable perch for mobile global capital.

Thatcherism, as continued by Blair, Brown, and others, brought a vast expansion of "wild-west" global credit markets.

It was already known, long before now, to bring financial instability. So far its financial crises (1987, 1991-2, 2001) had been relatively limited in "real" impact. But it was only a matter of time before a bigger one came.

### Q. So this is the end of that Thatcherite, "neo-liberal" era?

A. Not necessarily. There will certainly be more regulations. But it is not at all clear that capitalist governments will see a way to restore qualitatively more checks and balances, or have the will and ability to impose it if they do.

Global corporations organising their production globally — which have become more numerous and "global" in the last three decades — need global credit and "financial insurance" markets. What is "financial insurance" for the corporation seeking guarantees against movements in interest or exchange rates is, on the other side of the coin, "speculation" for the insurer, a bet that the insurer can judge the risks finely enough to make a profit on their "insurance" deals.

It is difficult for national governments to regulate a global system of credit and speculation. Even if the most visible excesses are curbed, there always tends to be room for a "wild west" in the shadows.

### Q. The governments now control the banks?

A. They have nominal control. The British government has blocked Royal Bank of Scotland, HBOS, and Lloyds from paying dividends.

In practice the governments will control the banks as lightly as they dare, for fear of antagonising the bankers. They emphasise that nationalisation or semi-nationalisation is only a temporary step, to be reversed as soon as the banks are in good shape again.

### Q. What sort of control would socialists recommend?

A. Socialism does not mean administrative planning, from the centre, of every economic detail, as practised in the Stalinist USSR. Trotsky, writing about the USSR, and not suggesting that his remarks were limited to a relatively undeveloped economy such as the USSR, poured scorn on "the superstition of administrative plan and the illusion of administrative prices".

Money, wrote Trotsky, cannot be abolished administratively any more than the state can. It can only "wither away" when "the steady growth of social wealth has made us... forget our miserly attitude toward every excess minute of labour, and our humiliating fear about the size of our ration".

In the meantime, given the public ownership of the big enterprises in trade and production: "The budget and credit

## For a workers' government!

*From page 3*

That fact, even at the height of the "marketist" delirium, made what Marxists advocate fundamentally rational — true to the underlying reality of the world we live in.

The problem is that the capitalist class and its servitors and ideological high priests hold political power everywhere (with odd exceptions like North Korea and Cuba, where Stalinist bureaucracies rule). That is the explanation for the "socialism for billionaires" now being resorted to by fanatically-marketist capitalist governments!

That is why *wholesale*, general conclusions are not drawn in the mainstream media — that this system is outmoded.

That is why these "social-ist" measures are "temporary" (in fact they will be held for an unforeseeable number of years). Why the capitalist media do not — as honest commentators would — draw the obvious conclusion: That this system needs to be replaced, not temporarily, and not in part, but finally and wholly, by the social administration of the economy. Administration not in the interests not of maximising private profit for shareholders and executives, but in the interest of satisfying human need, the needs of those who work the economy and whose lives are inseparably intertwined in its day to day "on the ground" workings.

The system that has now broken down in its financial sector is not only obscene in the way wealth is distributed, but also absurd in economic as well as human terms, historically outmoded.

In the past the idea of the "invading socialist society" led some socialists —

notably C L R James — to the foolish notion that the "invasion" was succeeding inexorably. No, it wasn't. No, it won't. The working-class revolution is the precondition for going from the present intermittent "bankers' socialism" to working-class socialism.

Only a workers' government, a government serving the working class and working people generally, can do what needs to be done. It will seize the political power over the economy from those who hold it now, and expropriate those who now appropriate the labour of the working class for their profits and bonuses. It will begin to administer society rationally.

It will develop democracy throughout society and the economy. It will make political democracy deeper than the shallow "politics" we now have under capitalism. It will organise the economy in ways that do not, like today's profit-oriented organisation, degrade and threaten to destroy the ecological system on which human life depends.

From the end of the 19th century until a couple or three decades ago, the sort of "social-ism" now coming back into fashion among our rulers was widely accepted. A leading bourgeois politician said 120 years ago: "We are all socialists now". They weren't, of course. Their "socialism" was state capitalism — the running of some industries by the state in the interests of capital as a whole.

Yet even that sort of "social-ism" gave a resonance to the educational work of working-class socialists, who thereby acquired an audience that was sympathetic rather than uncomprehending.

So too now and from now on. That imposes on working-class socialists the

responsibility to be sharp and clear in what we advocate, and on and to explain how working-class socialism differs from "bankers' socialism".

Only the working class — better-educated and better-organised — can finally eliminate the malign rule of the capitalist class, and replace it by democratic socialism. Only consistent and honest truth-telling can point the way forward for the labour movement.

The first concern of socialists must be the education of the labour movement and the working class in the need for independent class politics, politics which can enable the working class to overthrow capitalism.

The underlying objective social reason why so much of the ostensible left has succumbed to the politics of an "anti-imperialism of the idiots" and alliances with Islamic clerical fascism was the seeming impregnability of capitalism, which limited what socialists could hope to do. From that feeling of being stymied came hopes in, and alliances with, backward-facing forces "outside" the mainstream capitalist world and antagonistic to its greatest power (but also to much in modern society on which and in which democratic socialism has to be erected).

The accumulated political excrescences of decades won't wash away overnight; but the possibilities for rational socialists to clear out of the way the "reactionary socialist" nonsense of the kitsch left are now better than for many a long day.

Possibilities for regrouping rational working-class-facing democratic revolutionary socialists are opening up. We must ready ourselves for this work. We must explain the possibilities.

**PUBLIC SECTOR PAY**

# Striking on different days in November

By GERRY BATES

**C**ivil servants (PCS) and teachers (NUT) are set to strike in November against the Government's two-and-a-bit per cent limit on pay rises — but on different days.

How the foul-up happened is a mystery. Both unions now have avowedly left-wing Executive majorities and top full-time officials. Both union leaderships make a big deal of wanting united action by public sector workers against the Government's wage-cut plans.

Both unions have had plenty of leeway to select their time to ballot. NUT is following up on a one-day strike in April; PCS, on a national pay campaign which theoretically began years ago.

The NUT's ballot runs from 6 October to 3 November; the PCS's, from 24 September to 17 October. Under the current laws, a ballot mandate for industrial action has to be activated within 28 days, or it lapses. There is also a minimum time (seven days' notice to the employer) between a union getting a ballot mandate and organising a strike.

The NUT leadership says that it cannot convene its Executive and get notices out to the employers in time for a strike any earlier than the 19th. The PCS could time its strike after the 19th by activating the ballot mandate through an overtime ban or work-to-rule before the 19th, but does

not plan to do so; therefore its strike will be before 15 November.

At a recent PCS meeting, PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka presented the lack of coordination as positively a good thing. Having the strikes one a week after the other would, he said, "keep up the momentum".

But dispersed sectional strikes do not build up momentum. Joint strike action, joint rallies, might.

Mark Serwotka also defended the PCS leadership's presentation of the action to follow its ballot as limited to a strike in November, a strike in January, and "rolling" action in between. To talk of action after January would, he said, "discourage" PCS members.

Scattered one-day strikes will not win. Some members may feel "discouraged" by the Government's evident hard-faced attitude. But to try to get round that by proposing action without even raising the question of how to win will, in the medium term, "discourage" workers much more.

The NUT Executive met recently and discussed the problem, but got no further than a promise by acting General Secretary Christine Blower to "talk to the PCS again".

For activists in the unions, the task remains to get the maximum "yes" vote in the ballots; to coordinate at local level as much as possible; and to start the discussion on strategies that can win.

**SATS**

## Time to end “teaching to the test”

**O**n 14 October the Government abolished SATS exams for 14 year olds. The decision seems to have been prompted by the fact that the private contractor (of course) which ran the SATS this year fouled it up and had to be sacked, and the Government had trouble finding a replacement in time for 2009.

But it is good that the 14 year old SATS are gone. The National Union of Teachers responded with a call for the suspension pending review (why not the abolition?) of 11-year old SATS too.

A House of Commons select committee report earlier this year concluded: "We believe that the system is now out of balance in the sense that the drive to meet government-set targets has too often become the goal rather than the means to the end of providing the best possible education for all children..."

"This is demonstrated in phenomena such as teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum and focusing dispropor-

tionate resources on borderline pupils [at the expense of those who look certain to do well, or to do badly, in the test]. We urge the Government to reconsider."

Head teachers told the committee that some schools spend almost half of all lesson time preparing for tests in the final four months of the year.

In other words, SATS had become a means of testing how well schools cram for SATS, and schools had become a means of cramming for SATS (and GCSE, and AS levels, and A levels).

Another investigation this year found that two-thirds of parents believe SATS are a waste of time and that they put their children under unnecessary stress.

Education in England could be run with a minute fraction of the formal testing currently imposed on it. Students would learn more and enjoy more. Teachers and students would be less stressed. They could focus more on learning what's important, rather than cramming "what you need to know for the test".

**Our answer to house repossession: take it over and turn it into social housing**

mechanism is wholly adequate for a planned distribution of the national income".

A workers' government would seize control of the financial institutions, and of the big enterprises in trade and production, to direct credit and investment towards social need, rather than to what is most profitable to a greedy few.

By doing so, it would lift the burden of exploitation from wage-labour, enable workers to gain security of life and real control over their working lives and the aims of production, and gear the economy towards reducing the burden of drudgery, and increasing cultured free time, for all.

**Q. In the meantime, what do we do about the threat to jobs?**

A. Nouriel Roubini, the American academic economist who was the first to see this credit crisis coming, now expects a severe recession in the USA over the next 18 to 24 months, with unemployment rising to 9%. Other big economies will follow the same sort of pattern.

We should demand that working hours are cut, without loss of pay, to share out the jobs among those seeking work; and that the government expands public services, thus creating more jobs there.

**Q. Expanding public services? Surely governments will cut public services because of the stress on their budgets caused by huge spending on bank bailouts?**

A. In rational capitalist terms, they should not. Roubini, for example, writes: "it is necessary now to boost directly public consumption of goods and services via a massive spending programme... unemployment benefits should be sharply increased together with a targeted tax rebate only for lower income households... old-fashioned traditional Keynesian spending by the government is necessary".

Whether the governments act in that rational capitalist way remains to be seen. But to fight for them to do so is not to fight for something which is inconceivable or utopian.

**Q. What will happen to inflation?**

A. All the financial pages say it will decrease. Oil prices have gone down. But the governments are, most of all, terrified of deflation — a steady trend for average prices to *decrease*. Deflation, as in Japan in the 1990s, would probably produce a very long depression.

To counter the risk of deflation, the governments are willing to pump cash into their economies in a way which only weeks or months ago they would have

denounced as recklessly inflationary.

Inflation may not drop sharply. Demand automatic protection against cost-of-living increases as a bottom line in all pay deals.

**Q. What can we do about housing?**

A. Experts in the USA reckon that: "Before 2012 dies down about 6.5 million houses will be foreclosed". Hundreds of thousands of people will lose their homes in the UK too, as credit tightens.

We should demand that public authorities take over all housing going into foreclosure, turning it into social rental housing at rents affordable to the tenants.

**Q. Isn't it too risky to go in for campaigns and strikes when the economy is crashing?**

A. A severe downturn will increase fear and may tend to depress confidence for struggle. But that is not automatic.

Governments and bosses will try to use the crisis to their advantage, to force structural changes in the balance of class forces which will "stick" (to their advantage) in a later recovery. That is what the Tories and the bosses did in the recession of the early 1980s.

We should resist — or the working class will suffer from the effects of this downturn long after the downturn has finished. And we can resist. The outcome is not set in advance. The US working class came out of the depression of the 1930s more unionised, and with more union rights, than it went in. The wage share of national income rose then, rather than falling as it did in the 1980s.

**Q. But socialists can't do much unless strikes and trade-union activity increase?**

A. Not true. In the period of the great rise of mass socialist working-class movements before 1914, the British and Australian labour movements had lots of strikes, and the German labour movement comparatively few. Even collective-bargaining arrangements were rare in Germany.

But Marxists universally regarded the German workers' movement as the world's most advanced, and the British and Australian movements as backward, because the socialist political self-education and organisation of the working class in Germany was far more advanced than in Britain or Australia.

Socialist political organisation can expand, and win concessions and victories, even while trade-union activism remains depressed. Above all, this crisis highlights the need, and creates openings, for socialists to change the thinking of workers and young people around us — to make new socialists.

## FIGHTING FASCISM

# Stop BNP on streets of Leeds!

BY DAVID KIRK

**O**n Saturday 18 October the fascist British People's Party are planning a racist march to HMV, Leeds, against rap music. As with the BNP leader Nick Griffin's recent rally in Stoke this is a test to see if fascists can once again openly organise on the streets of Britain.

In the 1930s and again in the 1970s fascists held open rallies, marches and meetings in city centres and in areas with large Jewish, black and Asian communities. Yet Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts in the 1930s and the National Front in the 1970s were largely driven from the streets by workers' movement and local communities. Since then, despite the BNP's electoral gains began, they have not dared march through any major city.

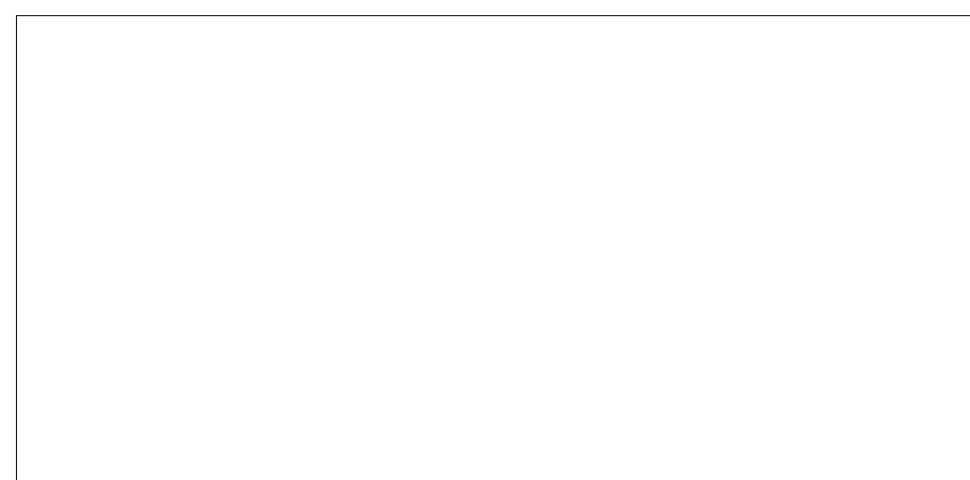
The fact that the fascists feel emboldened to rally in Stoke and Leeds is undoubtedly down to the weakness of working class anti-fascism. In Leeds the counter demonstration against the BPP is called by Antifa, a small collective of anti-fascist anarchists who believe in

direct action. Whilst this group is in many ways admirable it does not effectively challenge the political ideas behind fascism or seek to build a mass democratic movement in the working class.

"Unite Against Fascism" (UAF), has many trade union affiliates, but has been slow to respond to BPP's march. It is now building for the demo but its strategy is to hand out leaflets telling people "don't vote Nazi". It also seeks active support from the capitalist parties for their campaigns, and that means stifling criticisms of the very policies that have helped nurture the BNP.

In Leeds the Alliance for Workers' Liberty called a joint organising meeting with Workers' Power for the demo and to talk-about an anti-fascist group could raise slogans for a working class response to the fascists. However Workers' Power would not even consider a joint leaflet because it would not make its first demand "a new workers' party". It seems building working-class anti-fascist unity is less important than posturing.

There is another model of organising against the fascists. The East Midlands



Scum

Stop the BNP group has been founded by trade unionists, local community activists, socialists and anarchists from a range of groups. In August it organised a large demo in Codnor in Derbyshire against the BNP's annual "Red, White & Blue Festival", and on 27 September a conference in Nottingham. Without being sectarian or ultra-left, it has raised the political demands that UAF refuses' to. This is the kind of campaign that is

necessary in Leeds and elsewhere.

Now we are in a period of economic crisis the fascists will go on the offensive and will recruit those offered no alternatives to the miseries of capitalism. The workers' movement must be ready to respond effectively to defeat the fascists.

- Demonstrate against the BPP. Saturday 18 October, 10am, corner of Lands Lane and Albion Place, Leeds.
- nobnfpfestival.wordpress.com

## SOCIALIST-FEMINISM

## Extend abortion rights to Northern Ireland

BY FEMINIST FIGHTBACK

**O**n 22 October, MPs will vote on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. As well as several anti-choice, anti-women amendments, there are real opportunities to extend abortion rights — including access to abortion for women in Northern Ireland, an end to the two doctor rule, increasing the pool of abortion practitioners, allowing more local abortion services and banning misleading advertising.

Feminist Fightback are focusing on the extension of abortion rights to Northern Ireland, where currently it is illegal to have an abortion, even in cases of rape and incest. Working class women suffer the most. As well as having to fund travel abroad, the procedure is £600, which means some women are forced to bear



Dianne Abbot sponsors amendment on Northern Ireland

children against their will. Cathleen O'Neill of Alliance for Choice explains: "If I had a pound for every fundraiser I worked on to help working class women go to England for an abortion, I'd be a rich woman... Almost every other week. It's bad enough for those who can afford to travel, but for poorer women it's hell. It's time those who claim to represent us to get a grip on reality and take steps to end this nightmare".

We will be taking direct action in London, at the same time as Alliance for Choice activists in Belfast, to heap on pressure to ensure our sisters in Northern Ireland have access to the same abortion rights as women in England, Scotland and Wales.

- Protest: 7.30am-9am Monday 20 October. Get in touch: 07976 274516 or feminist.fightback@gmail.com for more details.

• Other Feminist Fightback actions: [www.feministfightback.org.uk](http://www.feministfightback.org.uk)

• The Abortion Rights campaign have called a protest outside Parliament before the final votes on the amendments. Tuesday 21 October, from 5.30pm onwards. [www.abortionrights.org.uk](http://www.abortionrights.org.uk)

## EDUCATION NOT FOR SALE

## Demonstrate in 2009!

**A** coalition of student activists, in a campaign initiated by Education Not for Sale, are planning to organise a demonstration at the start of 2009 against all fees and for a living grant.

The demands are:

\* No raising of the cap on top-up fees; halt and reverse the growth in international students' fees; abolish all fees in higher education and further education — free education for all;

\* A living grant for every student over 16 — at least £150 a week; and a living wage for nursing and other students who have to work as part of their course;

\* Stop and reverse marketisation in our schools, colleges and universities — tax the rich and corporations to fund education.

They want to organise this demonstration in alliance with trade union activists fighting back against wage freezes, job cuts and privatisation; with other anti-cuts and privatisation campaigns; with young people's and children's organisations; and with others who believe that education should be open to all as a human right, not a privilege open to a minority based on wealth.

They are also calling on the National Union of Students and autonomous campaigns within NUS to support the demonstration.

- To see the full statement go to [www.free-education.org.uk](http://www.free-education.org.uk)

More info:  
[education.not.for.sale@gmail.com](mailto:education.not.for.sale@gmail.com).

## REFUGEE RIGHTS

## No deportations to war zones

**R**efugee rights and anti racist campaigners took to the streets of Sheffield on Saturday 3 October to protest against the inhuman treatment of asylum seekers by the authorities in Britain. In particular they wanted to highlight the policy of locking up asylum seekers, sometimes for long periods, in detention centres — in some cases along with their young children. Over 100 people marched from Sheffield City Hall to the Peace Gardens to call for asylum seekers to be given the right to work and for an end to deportations to war zones.

Amongst those on the protest were:

- Iraqi Kurds who have been threatened with removal to Iraq;
- Annociate Nimpagaritse, a young

woman who fled violence in Burundi, recently released from a detention centre. Annociate hopes to train as a nurse but is not allowed to work.

• Claude Ndeh, a teacher from Cameroon, who was taken into detention with his three young children who were born in the UK and released following support from campaigners in Sheffield. Two of his children have the sickle cell anaemia.

• Aman Ali, a young man from Afghanistan who recently won the right to stay in Britain, spoke from his wheelchair — he was paralysed after an accident on a building site after he was made destitute.

The protest was organised by the Sheffield Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers.

## Feminist Fightback North

Feminist Fightback North is a network of socialist feminist activists based in the north of the country. We hold open meetings roughly every six weeks — open to all self-defining women — and organise direct actions and public meetings similar to those Feminist Fightback holds in London.

We work closely with various trade unionists, student activists, No Borders Campaigns and climate action groups.

• To find out more information contact [femfight.north@googlemail.com](mailto:femfight.north@googlemail.com)

## FAR RIGHT IN AUSTRIA

# Where fascists won 30%

BY JACK YATES

The timely death of the Austrian far right "guru" Jörg Haider is a cause for a double celebration. First and foremost because the demise of Europe's most prominent and successful fascist warms the hearts of all those committed to democracy and freedom. But also because, at last, he can perform some useful social function: fertilising the soil.

In the recent Austrian elections close to thirty percent of the votes were cast for one of the two major fascist organisations. This comes after Haider led his "Freedom Party" [sic] into joint government between 2000 and 2006. Although it looks unlikely that the fascists will return to those heady heights in the immediate term, their presence in parliament and on the Austrian streets is a cause of great alarm.

Haider and his movement experienced the best and worst of times. The child of Nazi parents (his father a storm trooper and mother a leader of the Nazi "League of German Maidens") he grew

up in relative poverty as both parents were banned from their pre-war jobs. Excelling at school and university, Haider — with the help of a generous bequest from a war-profiteering uncle — built a career as a lawyer and ascend-

**Haider in "traditional" Austrian mode**

ed to the leadership of the "Freedom Party", serving as youth leader and then as a member of the Austrian parliament for many years.

Popular in his adopted bastion, the region of Carinthia, where he served as

the first third-party premier, Haider built a base of support by courting hard-line wartime Nazi veterans and skinhead outfits. Not even his praising of Hitler's policies and celebrating the record of the Waffen-SS damaged his credibility. His partiality to contrary populism, grand-standing and squabbles had the duel effect of creating a personal national platform and alienating members of his party. Organisational splits ensued.

But Haider's version of Euro-fascism has been a standard by which other fascist organisations — not the least the BNP — measure themselves. The mix of local and national electoralism, populist campaigning and mingling with the seedy underside of fascism worked in Austria, so why not elsewhere? Austrian workers, traditionally ruled by the mainstream conservative or social democratic parties, have suffered similar social and economic onslaughts to those experienced by British and other European workers. Haider's fascism struck a chord there and as we are witnessing, the BNP is experiencing a modest expansion.

## NEW ZEALAND

## Left hopes to score in election

ing the political centre ground...

But there are differences too: most unions are not affiliated to NZ Labour, and the voting system, Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMP) means that small parties can end up holding the balance of power. One such party is the Maori Party, formed by a split from Labour after a dispute over indigenous rights to the foreshore and seabed. The Maori party has indicated that it would be willing to form a government with either Labour or National, depending on the circumstances. The Greens have made similar noises.

There have been a few recent developments on the left. The Alliance continues to plod along, a left wing split from Labour, now a shadow of its former self since its former president jumped ship back to Labour. It now faces competition from two newly registered parties: RAM and the Workers' Party.

Residents' Action Movement is largely the initiative of Socialist Worker, who flew in George Galloway last year to help fight the practically non-existent problem of Islamophobia in New Zealand. The increasingly reformist trajectory of SW resulted in a number of their younger comrades in Auckland splitting to the left to form Socialist Aotearoa.

The Workers' Party is the product of the merger of two small groups that describe their political background variously as "pro-Mao" and "pro-Trotsky".

**Workers' Party will challenge Helen Clark's Labour**

BY MIKE KYRIAZOPOULOS

The eyes of the world may be transfixed by the spectacle of the race for the White House, but there's another election in November that deserves some attention. New Zealand is going to the polls.

There are a few similarities with Britain: Labour has been in office for long time, and there is widespread disillusionment; National (the Tories) has a new, young leader aggressively pursu-

"Workers should be running the country" is the party's slogan for this election, and key policies include open borders and NZ troops out of Afghanistan. The WP has had some recent successes: last year, the west Auckland mayoral election candidate won 2101 votes standing on a hard left platform; and another young member played a leading role in the Wellington bus drivers' strike/ lockout, having just won presidency of the union.

With lower "barriers to entry" for minor parties, the New Zealand elections could prove more interesting than some other "two horse races".

- The politics of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty
- Why the working class is key
- Can the labour movement be transformed?

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## SOLIDARITY

**IRAQ:** A leading gay activist in Iraq has been assassinated. Last month, 27 year old Bashar the coordinator of Iraqi LGBT in Baghdad and a university student, was assassinated in a barber shop.

While homosexuality is not illegal in Iraq, several laws are used to persecute gay people.

Laws against loitering, indecent exposure, spreading "dangerous diseases," committing an "indecent" act in public and making "indecent" advances are all used.

But the main danger remains the threat of the militias groups.

Support Iraqilgbt:  
<http://iraqilgbtuk.blogspot.com/>

**IRAN:** Repression against labour activists in Iran is intensifying.

Sousan Razani and Shiva Kheirabadi, were recently sentenced to jail terms and whipping for the "crime" of having participated in a May Day demonstration in Iran this year. Sousan has been ordered to receive nine months in prison and 70 lashes.

Labourstart is running campaigns to put pressure on Iranian authorities and to highlight these and other cases, including that of Mansour Osanloo, who has been in prison since July 2007.

[www.labourstart.org/iran](http://www.labourstart.org/iran)

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# Teamsters against the Silver Shirts

## The story of a US anti-fascist “union defense guard”

1935 Roosevelt signing the Social Security Act. Reforms of the 30s, intended to alleviate the depression, then waned

By TOM UNTERRAINER

The history, politics and struggles of the rank-and-file Minnesota Teamsters in the 1930s provides countless examples of how effective socialist leadership can transform the working class movement.

Among these examples is the story of the “544 Union Defense Guard” (UDG). Formed in response to heightened activity from the anti-union, fascist “Silver Shirt” movement, the UDG developed from an organisation to protect union and radical meetings from attack to a tool that forced all fascist activities out of Minneapolis.

The example of the UDG is an inspiring and timely lesson in militant, working class anti-fascism.

### WORKERS’ DEFENCE

The tactic of workers organising for self-defence did not originate with the Teamsters. Throughout the history of the labour and socialist movements, our opponents have used physical violence against us. In the court transcripts of veteran Trotskyist James P Cannon’s defence against the charge of “conspiring to advocate the

overthrow of the US government” (printed as *Socialism on Trial*) he explains some of the history:

“I have known about the idea of workers’ defense guards and seen them organised long before I ever heard of the Russian Revolution ... [later] in the first years of our [the American Trotskyist movement] existence ... [the] Communist Party, the Stalinists, tried to break up our meetings by hoodlum violence ... They tried the Stalin game [of violence against critics]... we reacted by organising workers’ defense guards to protect our meetings. And I may add, parenthetically, we protected them so well that we put a stop to that monkey business at the cost of a few cracked heads, which I personally greatly appreciated in those days.”

The organisation Cannon helped build, the American Socialist Workers’ Party (no relation to the current British SWP) organised similar defence guards in response to threats from the far-right. In New York the Nazi supporting “Bundists” and a fascist organisation calling itself the “Christian Front” posed a particular threat:

“[I]n some parts of the country [from 1938-1939] we were confronted with an incipient fascist movement. Different organizations with different

names began preaching Hitlerite doctrines in this country, and tried to practice Hitlerite methods of physical intimidation of workers’ meetings, of Jews, Jewish stores, and suppressing free speech by violent methods.

“In New York it became a rather acute problem. The various Bundist and associated groups in New York developed the practice of breaking up street meetings when either our party or some other workers’ party would attempt to speak ...

“Basing ourselves on the experiences of the German and Italian fascist movements, which began with gangs of hoodlums and ended by destroying completely the labor unions and all workers’ organisations and all civil rights — we came to the conclusion that the fascists should be met on their own ground, and that we would raise the slogan of workers’ defense guards...”

We discussed this with Trotsky; his part in it was primarily an exposition of the development of the fascist movement in Europe... he heartily seconded it that our party should propose that the unions, wherever their peace was menaced by these hoodlums, should organise workers’ defense guards and protect themselves.”

Like the post-war 43 Group, the

American Trotskyists organised to meet “like with like”. But rather than build communal organisations they looked to the labour movement, the organised working class, for a response.

### FASCISM IN MINNEAPOLIS

In response to the “stormy” rise of the Congress of Industrial Organisations in the early 1930s, right wing, proto-fascist organisations began to emerge across the United States. In Minneapolis and elsewhere, these anti-union groups made little headway in the face of a fighting, militant labour movement in the process of forging a national organisation. The situation changed markedly in the late 1930s as economic and social problems developed:

“Clashes between capital and labor in times of social crisis tend to stimulate activity among political demagogues with a fascist mentality. They anticipate that intensification of the class struggle will cause sections of the ruling class to turn away from parliamentary democracy and its methods of rule, and resort to fascism as a way to hold on to state power and protect special privilege. Each of the aspirants hopes, moreover, to be chosen as the ‘fuehrer’ to lead the terrorist movement needed for the murderous assault on the working class that accompanies such a turn in policy.” [Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Politics*]

From 1937 the US economy experienced a new economic crisis. The New Deal — a scheme of mass public works, initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to create jobs, reform business practices and aid economic recovery in the Great Depression — collapsed, unemployment rocketed again and the government began preparations for war.

In circumstances where the trade union leaderships failed to provide an effective response, where layers of the middle class became increasingly demoralised, and where patriotic sentiment was stoked by a war-minded administration, many people turned to the right.

As a result, various profascist groups that had sprung up earlier began to recruit quite rapidly, and they received a parallel increase in financial backing from wealthy antilabor interests. Emboldened by this new support, they became more aggressive, as well as more provocative. In some instances these outfits organized uniformed bands of storm troopers, which were drilled openly; and whether uniformed or not, thugs of that type mobi-

### The CIO organised black (and women) workers. Far-right organisations reacted to the CIO's efforts and struggles

lized to launch terror campaigns".

The Silver Shirts were one such organisation. Formed in 1932 by William Dudley Pelley and initially concentrating their organising efforts on small towns and agricultural communities, by 1938 the Silver Shirts made their first, tentative steps into Minneapolis. Dudley's deputy, Roy Zachary, organised two rallies on July 29 and August 2 at the Royal Arcanum Hall, Minneapolis. The Teamsters were aware of Zachary's arrival in the city and kept close tabs on his movements.

The meeting, attended by George Belden, head of Associated Industries — a major local employer — called for people to join the "fink union" the "Associated Council of Independent Unions", which had previously dragged the Teamsters into court. But the main aim of the rally was to encourage and organise an attack on the Teamsters Local (branch) 544 offices.

These meetings demonstrated a close relationship between union busting organisations, local businessmen and the fascist movement. Local 544 had only one choice — to form a defence guard to protect their offices, activities and membership.

#### ORGANISING FOR DEFENCE

**"Formation of the guard was reported in the Northwest Organizer, and a press release announcing the step was handed to the daily papers ... The new bodies functions were described in the report as 'defense of the union's picket lines, headquarters and members against anti-labor violence'. Through this action the local served public notice that it would take care of its own defense, putting no misplaced reliance on the police for protection."**

Local 544 had learned from the lessons presented by the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany and from bitter firsthand experience that the police and government are no friends of the unions. Rather than make calls for the banning of Silver Shirt's activities or protection from the police, the union acted in the best traditions of the movement: self-organisation.

"Local 544's pioneer action... not only served its own needs; the step blazed a trail for trade unionists everywhere in the country."

From the first, the Union Defense Guard did not restrict its membership to one particular union. They actively encourages other labour movement organisations to join the effort and had a perspective of involving the unemployed, minority groups, young people and "all potential victims of the fascists, vigilantes, or other reactionaries."

"The guard was in no sense an elite body. It was simply a businesslike formation open to any active union member. The only requirements for inclusion in its ranks were readiness to defend the unions from attack ... Moreover, its activities were conducted only with the consent of the membership of the trade unions involved, under their control."

The formation of the guard was a reactive, defensive measure against the very real threat of fascist attack. In the absence of a broader, effective working class leadership, the labour movement failed to stem the growth of fascism in the face of economic and social crisis. But this defensive step was not made by a small group of ideologically pure, self-selected purists. The militants in the Teamsters took every step to make the Union Defense Guard as big and inclusive as possible: the only requirement being a commitment to the labour movement. They saw themselves as taking necessary action but also aimed to encourage similar formations on a national scale. As in many other cases, the Minneapolis Teamsters were at the vanguard of workers struggle.

#### ON THE OFFENSIVE

**T**he 544 UDG organised itself into compact squads, each five strong, recruiting a total 600 members in a short space of time. Having drawn recruits from the local labour movement, it was important that the 544 UDG developed an independent life so as to protect unions from police persecution. They organised fundraising activities, lectures, training and the weapons necessary to defend from armed attack.

"Members of the guard were not armed by the unions, since in the given circumstances that would have made them vulnerable to police frame-ups. But many of them had guns of their own at home, which were used to hunt

game; and those could quickly be picked up if needed to fight off an armed attack by Silver Shirt thugs."

Effective anti-fascist work always depends on collecting information about fascist activity — not just details of meeting places, activities and actions but copies of fascist leaflets, papers and magazines. The 544 UDG used their intelligence gathering to great effect:

"[T]he Silver Shirts attempted to hold another rally, to be addressed by Pelley himself.

"On the day of the scheduled affair, a cab driver delivered Pelley to a residence in the city's silk-stocking district. The driver immediately reported this ... a section of the union guard [went] to Calhoun Hall, where the rally was to be held that night. Arrival of the union forces caused the audience to leave in a hurry, and the demagogue never did turn up."

Pelley — the would-be fuehrer — fled the city that very night. The UDG published a public statement designed to scare the fascists even further. The notice instructed all unit commanders to prepare their members for emergency mobilisation should the Silver Shirts return. At the next Silver Shirt meeting in St. Paul one of Pelley's deputies told the local press that:

"Leaders of the 544 have said we cannot hold meetings in Minneapolis,

but we shall hold them, with the aid of the police. The police know that some day they'll need our support and that's why they're supporting us now."

The fascists received massive police protection in St. Paul, something that hadn't been afforded to them in Minneapolis. But the Silver Shirts had already built some support in the city, not least from the biggest employer — Associated Industries. The 544 UDG quite reasonably assumed that some pressure would be put on the city police. In response, they organised a massive show of force.

"The high command of the union defense guard decided to put on a public show of force. The aim was twofold: to make it plain to one and all that the Silver Shirts were not going to operate in Minneapolis without a serious fight and, simultaneously, to test the guard's efficiency in the course of such a demonstration."

Only a handful of the UDG's main organisers knew that the emergency call was a drill. With just one hour notice, three hundred UDG members assembled in the centre of Minneapolis. This mobilisation had the desired effect: there were to be no more fascist meetings, no more propaganda stunts and the Silver Shirts never mentioned Minneapolis again. In the face of effective organisation, the fascists were driven from the city.

**The CIO had a lot of experience of defending themselves... against the police**

# New party to be founded in January

BY RHODRI EVANS

**A**t its congress in January this year, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, one of the main revolutionary socialist groups in France, decided on a drive to reach out and build "a new anti-capitalist party" (French initials NPA) from below. (See [www.workersliberty.org/lcr-npa](http://www.workersliberty.org/lcr-npa))

The decision was based on the electoral and opinion-poll successes of the LCR, and especially its presidential candidate Olivier Besancenot, since 2002; and partly also on the relatively rapid growth of the LCR since then.

There are no other big organised groups involved with the LCR in its "new party" project, though Gauche Révolutionnaire, linked to the Socialist Party in Britain, is definitely taking part, and the recently expelled minority faction of Lutte Ouvrière, L'Etincelle, is interested. But, on the LCR's reports, sizeable numbers have attended local groups, and a provisional "National Organising Committee" has been set up, only half of its members LCR.

The National Organising Committee met on 14 September, and a detailed account of its discussions is available on the LCR website.

The meeting took place, by a perverse accident, just hours before the world credit crisis spectacularly shifted into high drama, a development which must improve the chances for success in launching the new party and make it more urgent. A leaflet about the crisis issued by the "new party" movement on 6 October, and excerpts from another issued on 13 October, are translated on this page.

Unlike many of the responses of the British left, they focus on far-reaching political demands which challenge the logic of capitalism, such as the suppression of banking secrecy – what Marxists call "transitional demands", the sort of idea we've discussed in *Solidarity* in recent weeks under the phrase "workers' plan".

The French revolutionary left, operating in a more politicised and confident working class, is generally bolder on this sort of front than the British.

On the other hand, you'd think all this "bankers' socialism" would be an excellent opportunity to go beyond the negative idea of "anti-capitalism" to a positive argument about what working-class socialism can and must be.

The 13 October leaflet ends with a call – "In place of the logic of profit for a few, let us impose, without con-

cession, the logic of the social needs of all" – which seems a bit "up in the air". The idea of a workers' government, or anything similar, is not discussed.

On 14 September, the meeting started with debate on attitudes to a campaign being launched by the reformist left around the threat of privatisation of the postal service.

A campaign for a referendum on this question has been proposed. The meeting reckoned that "the committees in defence of the public postal service being set up should not limit themselves to, or focus on, the question of a hypothetical referendum. Their chief concern should be the question of privatisation in general. The idea of a referendum is just a tool to use in that context..."

"A few people were against supporting the call for a referendum, not thinking that it could help the other forms of struggle against privatisation, worried that it might serve to gloss up the image of the "plural left" [Socialist Party, Communist Party, Greens] and, worse, that the anger of post workers and service users could be channelled into forms of expression beyond their control".

The meeting decided on the outlines of an autumn campaign for the new anti-capitalist party "focused on the question of the worsening of living conditions (wages, prices, public transport, health, public services

more generally)".

Different speakers saw the campaign in two different ways. It could be seen as a campaign to make the new party project visible, a campaign where building the new party is a central concern. That could take the form of a leaflet of a propaganda type, denouncing the misdeeds of capitalism, or of a more active intervention, for example around supermarkets.

Or it could be seen as a campaign of agitation aiming to shift the overall balance of forces between the classes, one in which one would take to address both the population in general, the activists of the other left parties and the unions, and their leaderships.

The meeting set dates for next January. 29 January is pencilled in for a congress where the LCR will formally dissolve itself; the next three days, 30 and 31 January and 1 February, will be the founding congress of the new party.

A website for the new party has been set up at <http://npa2009.org>, and it is holding its first big rally in Paris on 6 November.

## "It is becoming urgent to break with capitalism"

*Leaflet of the "new party" movement issued on 13 October*

... It is urgent to put onto the agenda a ban on sackings and a general increase in wages.

In face of the "holy alliance" which the capitalists want to push us into [in response to the crisis], we need social unity of the working people and their organisations.

Let us demand full transparency – suppression of banking secrecy, the establishment of banking as a public service under the control of the population, by requisitioning the banks, to direct credit in line with the interests of the community.

In place of the logic of profit for a few, let us impose, without concession, the logic of the social needs of all.

# Sarkozy's enemy is anti-capitalism

*Leaflet issued October 6*

"I wish to say to the French people: anticapitalism does not offer any solution to the current crisis... The current crisis should incite us to refound capitalism on an ethical basis..."

N. Sarkozy at Toulon, 25 September

**W**ho would have imagined that the bling-bling President would one day denounce the "excesses" of "finance" capitalism? Yes, the situation is serious. Yes, the insatiable drive for profits by a handful of the rich is putting all of society in danger. The endless accumulation of capital is not a distortion of capitalism but the heart of its operation. In his speech at Toulon, Sarkozy recognised that huge mistakes have been made, distortions. But, he claimed, that didn't really represent capitalism, because the true capitalism would be "moral, ethical, productive". Hot air... The fact remains that his only proposal in the face of the crisis is to pursue and aggravate the anti-social attacks which he has already launched on all fronts.

Thus he has announced, in no real order: a new reduction in real wages and an explosion of job cuts; the continued pillage of the public health service; the acceleration of the states counter-reforms, with the boast that "next year will see an unprecedented total of 30,600 jobs cut from the public sector"; a fat packet of new handouts and tax cuts for the bosses.

In short, Sarkozy has promised that the state will come to the aid of the banks, insurers, and credit societies, if the latter find it necessary to default. As in the USA, we will "nationalise" the losses by financing them from our taxes. Already victims of low salaries, precarity and price increases, this way workers will suffer a real double loss.

At the same time, the privatisation of everything which could be profitable, will continue energetically. For example: the Postal Service, which the government has just announced will be "opened to capital" and will be floated on the stock exchange (a decision taken in the middle of the economic turmoil...)

The rich should pay for their crisis

All governments are worried for the future of the sys-

tem and are now talking about the need for "new regulations", of a greater state intervention in the economy. But whatever the degree of the sincerity of these declarations, they have one aim in common: to have the crisis, their crisis, paid for by the workers.

It's up to us to refuse to accept this and to take back from the financiers, the bosses and the shareholders all that they have stolen from us.

Struggles and resistance abound, but they remain dispersed and too often isolated. Let us help co-ordinate them, and unify them.

Amongst other mobilisations in the private and public sectors, the postal strike of Tuesday 23rd September was a success. A broad front of unions, political organisations and associations was formed at a national level. The battle which is beginning against the privatisation of the Postal Service could be the chance to put a halt to the attacks and to change the balance of forces.

Sarkozy has clearly identified his enemy: anticapitalism. There at least, things are clear. Neither ethical, nor moral, nor reformable, this savage system must be fought and overthrown. Come with us and build the NPA!

## MUSIC

# Asperger's, autism, and special talent

an endless enthusiasm for producing works of art, and a confident ability with numbers.

Joe was specifically interested in the phrase from one of the artists that the only thing she did not like about autism was the bullies who bully autistic people: he certainly understood that. It was a great experience because families with autistic kids often feel alone. Having a child with Asperger syndrome can make us more open-minded and tolerant of people's differences.

Simon Baron Cohen's ideas challenge common prejudices about the autistic spectrum, and can be very helpful to those of us parenting kids on the spectrum. But some autistic activists question his "expertise" as not representative of their own experience. Baron Cohen is an academic, a researcher, not a political activist. We surely need both. Baron Cohen is not a spokesperson for autistic people — that is something best done through self-organisation and political activism. But it seems to me that his work is nonetheless valuable.

## Whadda Ya Want to Break Your Back for The Boss For?

(Tune: "What Do You Want to Make Those Eyes at Me For?")

Toiling along in light from morn 'til night,  
Wearin' away your all for the Parasite;  
Workin' like a mule with a number two,  
Puffin' like a bellow when the day is through;  
Steering a load of gravel through the muck and  
slop  
Packing a hod o' mustard 'til you damn near flop;  
Trying to bust a gut for two twenty-five,  
Pluggin' like a sucker 'til five.

*Chorus*  
So whadda ya want to break your back for the boss  
for,  
When it don't mean life to you?  
Do you think it right to struggle day and night,  
And plow like Hell for the Parasite?  
So whadda ya want to break your back for the boss  
for,

When there's more in life for you?  
Slow up Bill! that's the way to beat the System;  
Join the Wobbly Gang, they've got the bosses  
guessing.  
So whadda ya want to break your back for the boss  
for,  
When it don't mean life to you?

Do it all today and you'll soon find out,  
Tomorrow there'll be nothing but to hang about,  
Looking at the "job sign," wondering why you  
rave,  
With a wrinkle on your belly like an ocean wave;  
Doughnuts then begin to hang a little high,  
You're pinched by the Bull for a "German spy";  
You're nothing but a bum, says the Judge with a  
smile,  
Thirty days on the Rock pile.

*From the IWW Songbook*

### Music: there to be enjoyed and maybe to find a talent for

BY JANINE BOOTH

**O**n Sunday 5 October, my son Joe and his dad went to the "Autism and Music" concert at the Savoy Theatre in London. It was promoted by the Autism Research Centre, which is based at Cambridge University and headed up by Professor Simon Baron Cohen.

Most people hear about the difficulties associated with autism and Asperger Syndrome, including social and communication problems, and obsessions. But the obsessions can also give rise to particular talents, which apparently cluster around music, art and maths. So the idea of the concert — and of an arts exhibition at the ICA later that week — was to show this more positive side of autistic spectrum disorders.

Speaking about the concert in advance, Baron Cohen also acknowledged also that life on the autistic spectrum can be hard, but went seamlessly into asserting

that the condition can bring strengths and talents as well as obstacles.

Unlike illnesses, such as cancer, our approach to autism is not about finding a cure, but about working out interventions that can help overcome the difficulties without diminishing the strengths.

A word of warning, though — don't expect everyone on the autistic spectrum to have some stunning talent. They are not all about to burst into scintillating music, produce a stunning piece of art or juggle numbers like Dustin Hoffman in *Rain Man*. And if they don't, they are not letting the autistic side down. Neither are they in any more need of a cure than those who do — they are in need of a society that accepts their neurological difference and deals with it.

Joe and his dad both got something out of the show. On the way home they talked about Joe's condition and how other people have it and can do cartwheels on stage and play beautiful music. Joe has a love of music,

## TV

## The sub-prime scam

ROSALIND ROBSON REVIEWS THE SUPER RICH, BBC4

**S**till trying to get your head round "sub-prime", "structured finance" and "deleveraging"? You could have done worse than Robert Peston's guide to how the Super Rich Fucked up all Our Lives. Here the basic mechanics of the financial crash were told quite well.

Peston was following up his book *Who Runs Britain? How the Super Rich are Changing our Lives\**. But he brought us right up to date with how the system which produced a proliferation of junk (and not so junk) financial goods eventually seized up.

Peston spent a long time examining the chain which led from sub-prime mortgages to the crash and he told us a little, but only a little, about the human story. That is a story worth thinking about some more.

Unscrupulous mortgage brokers in America sold huge numbers of mortgages to working-class people who really could not afford to take out huge loans, or did not know that their interest rates and repayments would go up rapidly once the initial "teaser" repayment period was over.

Really those brokers were nothing better than loan sharks hanging out in working-class neighbourhoods,

feeding on people's poverty and need to put a roof over their heads.

The huge rise in mortgage selling was backed by US politicians. They like Thatcher, and all bourgeois ideologues really, wanted a "property owning democracy".

Of course many thousands defaulted when the "teaser" period was over and the payments went up. They went back to living in rented accommodation once more. Or were left homeless. In Britain, if you are "lucky" the state will put you and your family in a bed and breakfast if you can't afford private rents. You won't get a council house because defaulting on a mortgage is classified as making yourself intentionally homeless.

If you're not lucky, you will be living in America, and ending up in shelter, your family split up, your life ruined forever.

Meanwhile the super rich are still having a great deal of difficulty spending their money, turning to personal shoppers to fulfil their material "dreams". One such dream merchant told how a client wanted a fighter plane in the front garden, another, a week living with tribe in a remote part of Africa — to get in touch with their spiritual self or some such garbage.

Obscene? You bet. It's enough to make you want to be a socialist.

\* Review: [www.workersliberty.org/node/10214](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/10214).

**AL QUDS DEMONSTRATION**

# Third Camp at Piccadilly Circus

By SACHA ISMAIL

**O**n September 28, supporters of the "Islamic Human Rights Commission" — actually a group with links to Islamic Republic of Iran — marched through London to mark "Al Quds day". The day of action is supposedly in solidarity with the Palestinians, but in fact was launched by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 to strengthen international support for his Islamist counter-revolution. About 300 people took part, similar to last year.

Stop The War Coalition (dominated by the SWP) and George Galloway's Respect sponsored the march, though only one Respect member was bold enough to turn up, and no SWPer did.

Workers' Liberty members, a few other British socialists and members of the Worker-communist Party of Iran turned up to counter-demonstrate, as did a larger group of broadly nationalist and, as it turns out, rightish Iranians. We demonstrated awkwardly next to each other until a third group turned up, composed of supporters of the "March for England" organisation, a nationalist group with English flags who are almost certainly some variety of fascists, though they denied it.

Our left contingent did not have the numbers to drive them off, so we asked the non-socialist Iranians to help us. Instead, their organiser, Potkin Azarmehr, was overheard telling the "March for England" people to "just ignore the communists". At that point, we separated ourselves off to create our own distinct demonstration, one which shouted anti-fascist as well as anti-Islamist slogans.

March for England soon showed their true colours in full technicolour, shouting "Hang them", "No surrender" and "White power" as the Al Quds march went by. Meanwhile the Iranian nationalists continued to mingle with these racists; in fact Azarmehr was seen embracing the March for England organiser.

This is an absolute disgrace. We were there to protest

against the Islamists (afterwards we actually joined their rally, where we leafleted before getting into some heated arguments and having the police called to move us off); but if the fascists had attacked a demonstration made up mostly of British Asians, we would have joined the demonstrators in fighting them off. Clearly for the Iranian nationalists present, fascist bigotry as fine — as long as its anti-Islamist. Naturally, we have nothing in common with such a perspective.

For the Al Quds counter-demonstration next year socialists should get organised enough in advance to create a mass, clearly left-wing and internationalist mobilisation which scum like March for England and

Al Quds day demonstration 2007

**SWP WATCH**

## Rent-an-SWPer... at a price

Crestfallen though the SWP is these days, it still seems to be trying to pull something pretty outrageous in Stoke.

According to a Socialist Party comrade posting on the Socialist Unity website ([www.socialistunity.com](http://www.socialistunity.com)), the Unite Against Fascism campaign which the SWP leads is demanding that the local anti-racist group NORSCARF provide it with £1,800 for "costs" incurred during the run up to the recent anti-BNP demo in Stoke. One of these costs is apparently the involvement of SWP full-timer Bunny La Roche. Having thoroughly pissed off pretty much everyone on the Stoke activist scene, Bunny has certainly merited the payment!

Perhaps the SWP will now try to charge Notts and Derbyshire anti-fascist activists for "services" rendered in attempting to scupper their recent demonstration against the BNP's Red, White and Blue festival.

## What does S stand for?

"While the pieces are in flux," said George Galloway in the *Guardian* on 9 October, "why don't we reorder this world?"

This is an aspiration which Galloway shares with *Solidarity*. His version is rather more modest than ours: not class struggle against this system, with the goal of replacing capitalism with working-class socialism but instead: "What's so wrong with the taxpayer having a seat in the boardroom?"

Galloway's article on the financial crisis on the Respect website was in a similar vein. Faced with "the mother of all recessions" (cf Saddam Hussein's promise of "the mother of all battles"; one of his oh-so-clever echoes of the Iraqi dictator), he writes, "many people in the City are saying, 'too little, too late'... It was essential that the government propped up the banks' capital base... we had to have a guarantee of bank debts... the government now needs to force the banks to pay the public back in return." Galloway advocates "pump priming" the economy in order to "truly modernise this country."

Another nail in the coffin of the idea that the S in RESPECT really stands for socialism.

**21ST CENTURY SOCIALISM**

# Minimax and transitional demands

**CATHY NUGENT BEGINS A SERIES ON BASIC MARXIST POLITICAL IDEAS**

**B**efore the First World War most socialist groups and many individuals from around the world were grouped together in an organisation called the Second International (set up in 1889). There were many different types of socialist organisation at that time, and often more than one in the larger countries. The most important and the biggest organisation was the German Social Democratic Party. Socialist activity tended to be organised around two different kinds of demands.

On the one hand, day to day "bread and butter" reforms for the working class, such as the eight hour day. This was the *minimum* programme of the socialists.

On the other hand, socialists also had a long-term goal of ending capitalist exploitation once and for all and introducing a socialist society based on equality. This was the *maximum* programme of the socialists.

How would the working-class on which they based their socialism get from A to B, from successful reforms to the socialist society? The assumption was that steady activity round the minimum demands would build the workers' organisation and confidence. Then, one day, capitalism would collapse into crisis, and the workers' movement would be strong enough to take over.

Many socialists assumed that periodic breakdowns in the functioning of capitalism would one day, almost automatically, lead to the overthrow of the system. But then apart from the experience of the Paris Commune in 1871, when Parisian workers took control of their city for nine weeks, the socialists had no real-life examples to help them think how the workers could take power.

After a while some socialists began to imagine a grad-

ual or evolutionary way in which the workers' movement could get from A to B, from reforms to socialism.

At this time capitalism was expanding in Europe. For instance capitalist factories were getting bigger, and bigger groups of workers were organising together against exploitation. New trade unions were being set up.

The right wing in the socialist movement, particularly in Germany, thought that as the trade unions grew and the socialist party grew, reforms would come more easily to the workers. Eventually the workers' movement could reform away all that was unpleasant about capitalism. It could set up workers' co-ops and win better democracy for working people. No need to rely on a final "crisis".

The German socialist Eduard Bernstein was one of these so-called "revisionists". He said, "The movement is everything, the goal is nothing". Left-wingers in Germany like Rosa Luxemburg fought bitterly against Bernstein.

Many of those who had believed in the "final crisis" put it further and further away in their minds, and in practice came to follow Bernstein's line. And then in 1914 they did the worst thing any socialist can do. They backed their own rulers in a war to expand power and territory — the First World War. What had gone wrong?

The parties of the Second International tended to see the working class as needing steady education in the ideas of socialism and being there to "back up" the party in its carefully-measured campaigns. They failed to appreciate how, when working class people come together to fight exploitation and oppression, they can learn more in a few days than routine agitation can teach them in decades. Their creativity can outstrip all the best-laid plans of the party. As Marx said, "the emancipation of the working class must be conquered by them-

selves". Unfortunately, even very erudite socialists began to put the interests of the party and of preserving the movement first. In 1914 they were scared of seeing their funds confiscated and their organisations banned if they should oppose the war.

The socialist movement had to reorganise itself during and after the First World War, and come to terms with why so many socialists had backed the ruling class war drive. And as revolution broke out in Russia in 1917 and in Germany in 1918, the socialists, now working in the new Communist Parties, wanted to organise the working class throughout Europe to confront capitalism.

They believed that in every struggle the working class should be pushed towards the most revolutionary possibilities. They thought it dangerous, especially in those times of tumultuous class struggle, to lose sight of the ultimate goals of the socialist movement. And they did not want to be "top down" socialists preaching to the workers about what they must do; instead they wanted to give expression to the workers' own dreams and desires.

So the new Communist International set up after 1917 decided to take the full socialist programme, all the things the workers would do if they were in power — from nationalise the banks, to the introduction of free education — and break it down into its component parts — into demands which were not "enough-for-now" reforms, but which in combination challenged the existing capitalist order and, if won, could take the workers' movement on to more radical, more generalised struggle. They were to be the logical next step in a revolutionary struggle. The socialists had systematised the idea of "transitional demands".

• Next issue: "transitional demands" today

**Left:** From left to right, Moshe Machover, chair Steve Freeman, Sean Matgamna.  
**Above:** listening to the speeches

## ISRAEL-IRAN DEBATE

# Politics and Ponzi logic

REPORT BY MARTIN THOMAS

**O**n one level, the debate between Sean Matgamna of Workers' Liberty and Moshe Machover in London on 12 October was a re-run of an old argument within the left.

Sean Matgamna argued that socialists should fight for a "two-states" settlement in Israel-Palestine – a really independent Palestinian state, in contiguous territory, alongside Israel.

Moshe Machover insisted that the "overthrow" of Israel (or, as he put it in the prior written debate, "anything like" present-day Israel) is a precondition for peace.

As Dave Ball noted from the floor, this is perhaps the most emotionally-charged debate on the British left, and so it was no surprise that the evening was rowdy. It was still welcome: it is rare to have big issues like this debated at length face-to-face, with a chance to give more or less comprehensive presentations on both sides.

Sean Matgamna opened. "AWL advocates compromise, recognition of the conflict of right against right... and... solving it on the basis of mutual accommodation: two states; as near as possible as justice for everybody; peaceful coexistence and... working-class unity across the divide between the two states".

Why would anyone left-wing ever argue anything else? A chief reason is "the demonisation of the 'Zionists'... in twentieth century history..."

What was the real story? There was a startling rise of anti-semitism in Europe at the end of the 19th century. Some Jews "concluded there had to be a Jewish state...

looked at the possibilities and... advocated persuading Jewish people to go to Palestine".

The Zionist movement "was initially rather weak" - but "as the crescendo of antisemitism built up towards the great slaughter, more and more Jews began to see the need for a Jewish state... Most of those who by the 30s came to see it like that... were driven by the fact that they couldn't go on... in the old way. It wasn't as though someone had a bright idea..."

"In 1947 the UN took a decision to partition Palestine... It was accepted by the Zionists... but... rejected by the Arabs... That led to the declaration of Israel in May 1948. As soon as Israel was declared, five Arab armies invaded, some of them officered by British soldiers..."

"The Israelis, just like the Bosnians in the 1990s, faced an embargo on weapons... They got guns from the Stalinist USSR by way of Czechoslovakia... Stalin was playing the Jews off against the British Empire, making trouble for the Empire..."

"In the course of the war and invasion... a large number of Arabs fled or were driven out. For the sake of clarity rather than to fudge the issue: they were driven out. This... happened as part of an ethnic, communal, national conflict... In 1948 and after 600,000... Jews were driven out of Arab countries and made their way to Israel.

"In that situation the victims were the Palestinians. It's not that they were the victims because by nature the Jews are vicious and victimisers. It's because they lost the war... If the Jews had lost the war they would have been faced with the tender mercies of... the Egyptian army, which invaded under the general slo-

gan of 'drive the Jews into the sea'.

"If we [socialists] had had armies on the ground, we'd have defended the Jews from the Arab pogromists and the Arabs from Jewish people attacking them. But we didn't have such forces on the ground".

From a one-sided reading of the history, people draw the conclusion that "the Jews, the Israelis are a bad people". For socialists, however, "there are no bad peoples undeserving of rights. There is no such thing as collective crimes which invalidate the rights of the nation... for the subsequent period".

As things are now, "the only possible programme for unification of the Jewish and Arab workers would be that they agree to fight oppression... workers' unity on the basis of dividing up the territory as amicably as possible".

Of course, "even the best Palestinian state would not be the economic equal of Israel... and from this comes the notion... that it's meaningless to have such a state..."

"Lenin in the middle of World War One called this idea 'imperialist economism'" — the idea that the overwhelming strength of the richest capitalist countries meant that it was pointless to fight for the political rights of the smaller nations.

In fact "there is a great deal to be gained" by an independent Palestinian state.

"People who put forward impossible pre-conditions before anything can be done to alleviate the condition of the Palestinians... are not the friends of the Palestinians..."

"Two states is the only pro-Palestinian position... The bane of the movement [is] people who... are more interested in destroying Israel than in helping the Palestinians..."

Moshe Machover responded: "every single part of this so-called historical thesis has been refuted".

He argued that Zionism was a "wrong" answer to anti-semitism. "If you meet a man in a pub saying 'Jews should not be living among Gentiles, they should be living among their own kind', is he a Zionist or an anti-semit? He could be either".

Some Zionists had rejoiced at it becoming evident that assimilation was becoming unviable. In 1938, the Zionist leader Ben Gurion had been alarmed at the Evian conference, called to consider emergency measures for Jewish emigration, because it would "separate the issue of the [Jewish] refugees from that of Palestine".

"Zionism is a project of colonisation... the last one that is still active... This is the root of the problem". Machover quoted Vladimir Jabotinsky's 1923 article advocating an "iron wall" against the Arabs to make room for a Jewish state.

Colonisation still proceeds in the West Bank. "This is

## John Bridge: 'Drive AWL social imperialists out of the labour movement'

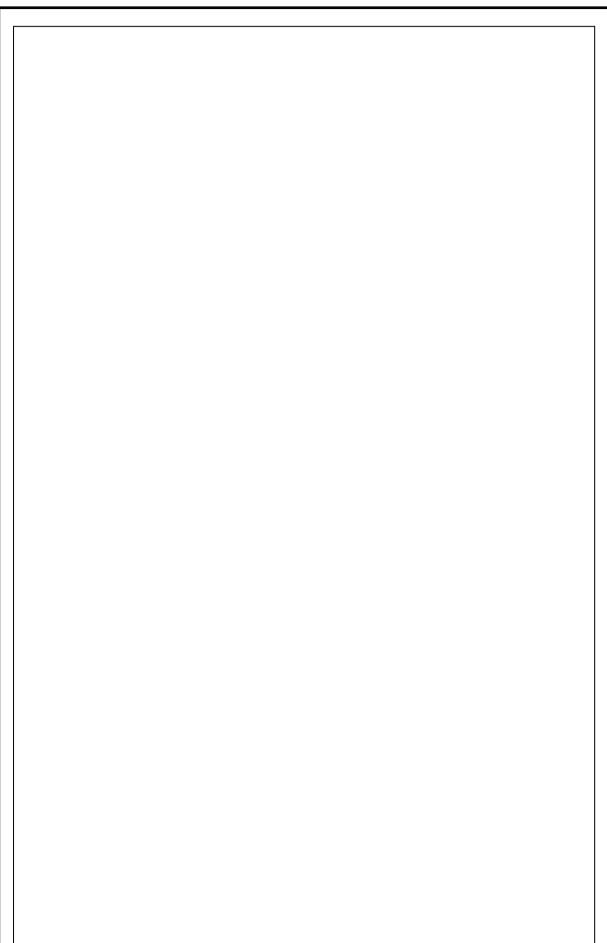
**L**istening to Sean, it felt like he was living on a different planet... I heard a caricature description of the left. I felt "is he talking to the SWP or is he talking to the CPGB, is he talking to people in this room or is he talking to people in his imagination?" Quite clearly he's talking to people in his own fertile imagination,

because he wasn't talking to anybody who's his opponent in this room.

We were told in his AWL leaflets that the main question today is Iran arming itself with nuclear weapons and preparing to attack little Israel. Sorry comrades, you've got it the wrong way around. Try reading a newspaper, try actually listening to the news. What you'll find is it's not nasty Iran who's just about to launch a nuclear strike or a pre-emptive strike on Israel, but the other way round...

And what's Sean's response to this strike that he views as "inevitable"? What he said was that he and the AWL... would stand aside. What can we object to? In what name have we got the right to object to such a strike? Nothing, nothing...

You comrades are vicarious Zionists... What you've done is cross class lines and constitute yourselves as social imperialists. And that needs driving out of the labour movement, yes it does, and yes it will be.



## Peter Manson: 'we do not tell lies'

I'm the editor of the *Weekly Worker*... The *Weekly Worker* does not publish lies... It's counter-productive to tell lies, especially when you're engaged in polemics against another organisation. It's counter-productive to misrepresent them knowingly. Sometimes we make mistakes as all people do but we do not tell lies, not while I'm editor we don't.

When we said on our front page that Sean Matgamna was excusing a nuclear attack on Iran, that was our understanding of it... He said that faced with the Tehran lunatics — if I may be allowed to paraphrase — Israel's got the right to self-defence, including of course a pre-emptive strike against Iranian nuclear installations.

In the name of what alternative would be condemn such an attack? The answer was quite clearly that we would not condemn such an attack... We wouldn't oppose it either. The National Committee of the AWL voted against this. So... it's putting it very mildly indeed to say you excuse an attack...

I can quite accept that Sean Matgamna didn't realise that such an attack on Iranian nuclear installations would have to be nuclear, they would have to be facilitated by a nuclear armed bunker-busters. He didn't realise that, but ignorance is no excuse...

In fact any attack to be effective, to take out Iran's nuclear installations, would have to be done by nuclear armed bunker busters. That is a fact and that is what we said. There's nothing untrue about that, it's 100% true.

what the Israeli state is all about. The Israeli state is not a national state in the ordinary sense".

Zionism is also inseparable from imperialism. First, British imperialism. "This went on until the 1930s, when British interests changed..." Later, US imperialism.

Machover discussed at length Israel's role in the Suez war in 1956, arguing that conflict with Iran is likely to follow "a similar scenario".

In Israel-Palestine now, "one state, two states, no state, this is not the point... Socialists should insist on principles... equality of individual rights and equality of national rights... for the Palestinians and for the Hebrews..."

"No feasible solution is possible within the box of Palestine, whether divided into two or as one country. The balance of forces within Palestine does not allow for it... The problem will not be solved properly short of a social transformation of the whole region. If you are thinking of interim solutions which will alleviate the problem, you are deluding yourselves. They will result in a continuation of Israeli Zionist colonisation".

Machover asserted that "no-one" on the left supported the destruction of Israel, and said that he fought for the "overthrow" of Israel.

From the floor, Cathy Nugent argued that the history of Israel and of the Jewish people in the 20th century cannot be seen as just an expression of the errors or bad ideas of historical Zionism. Sacha Ismail pointed out "for a Palestinian state with the same rights as Israel" is an AWL slogan. Moshe Machover heckled to ask whether a Palestinian state today would have equal land area with Israel. Ismail responded that the importance of political self-determination for nations is not conditional on them having equal land areas: Ireland having a smaller land area than Britain did not make Irish independence meaningless.

Jim Denham said that Zionism today is in fact Jewish nationalism. Socialists are not nationalists, but we understand that nationalism cannot be abolished at will, and must be given a certain space. Tom Unterrainer asked how we would answer the Jewish survivors in the camps in Europe after World War Two.

Moshe Machover had declared, to great applause from some of the audience, that the "right of return" to Israel of 4.6 million Palestinian refugees (descendants of those who were driven out or fled in 1948) was an indispensable first principle. Martin Thomas responded that this "right of return" is a demand not for individual rights, but for collective repossession of the territory, a reversal of 1948. Propose it as a precondition for peace, and you are making peace impossible.

The tone of the debate on Israel-Palestine was set by speakers like Tony Greenstein, Michael Kalmanovitz, Maggie Ronayne, and Roland Rance. They all argued, and some of them stridently, that the "dismantling" of Israel is a precondition for peace.

Significantly, they all got great applause, and certainly no contradiction, from the members of the *Weekly Worker* group (CPGB) who made up the core of the "other side" from the AWL in the debate.

On paper, the WW agrees with the AWL on "two states"! Tina Becker, a longstanding member of the WW group, told Martin Thomas of AWL in a conversation after the end of the meeting that WW had changed its position to "something much closer to Moshe Machover". We are told by the WW office that this is not so; their group's majority position is still for "two states". A minority supports the view that the Israeli Jews must be subsumed into a single state covering all

of 1948 Palestine.

The interesting thing is that we have to research all that after the debate. After seven speeches from WW people, and vehement ones too, we were none the wiser about their actual policy.

With one exception, the WW speakers used their time not to propose politics, but to try to "scandalise". Sean Matgamna, in an article in *Solidarity* 3/136, had not used strong enough words against a possible Israeli attack on Iran! Therefore he "excused" such an attack! Such an attack would inevitably be a nuclear attack! So Matgamna was "excusing an Israeli nuclear attack on Iran"!

Peter Manson reckoned he could establish that the *Weekly Worker* had been "truthful" about this by... "paraphrasing" what Matgamna wrote! As if the exact meaning of a text can be determined by giving your own paraphrase — let alone the flatly inaccurate paraphrase Manson made! "The answer was quite clearly that... we would not condemn such an attack... We wouldn't oppose it either. The National Committee of the AWL voted against this... So it's putting it very mildly indeed to say you excuse an attack". (The AWL NC voted against an amendment to add the word "oppose" to "we are against" such an attack, considering it meaningless except as a de facto concession to the original *Weekly Worker* "argument" that using words other than those they would prefer to express opposition amounts to "excusing". So to be against something is to excuse it...!)

John Bridge stepped further up this daft logical ladder, this verbal Ponzi scheme, this elaborate exercise in construing A to mean B, B to amount to C, C to entail D... and so A to equal Z. "What you've done is cross class lines and constitute yourselves social imperialists. And that needs driving out of the labour movement, yes it does. And yes it will be".

Sean Matgamna, in one of the short response sessions that the platform speakers were called in for mid-debate, and Paul Hampton, Sacha Ismail, Dave Ball, Matt Cooper, and Robin Sivapalan, from the floor, all refuted this nonsense.

John Bloxam challenged Moshe Machover. Machover had noticeably not repeated the WW's wild allegations, and in his mid-debate response he rebuked "sectarian bickering from both sides". But why did he not openly repudiate the crazy stuff about "driving the AWL out of the labour movement"?

The politico-psychological mechanism in the WW's scheme seems to be something like what psychologists call projection: in Peter Gay's words, "the operation of expelling feelings or wishes the individual finds wholly unacceptable — too shameful, too obscene, too dangerous — by attributing them to another". You find yourself in a conflict with someone, mistreating them — and you deal with it by persuading yourself that they are mistreating you.

The WW people identify with Iran. They find the fact that Iran has been developing a nuclear-weapons programme (even if it is currently stalled), and the fact that "death to Israel" has been a prime catchcry of the regime for decades, too uncomfortable to deal with. So they "project" the nastiness onto Israel and the USA. Israel is going to nuke Iran! Israel is inseparable from the USA! The Israeli attack will only be the first step in a US drive to "bomb Iran into the stone age" (WW) or "wipe out Iran" (Tina Becker, in the debate).

The exception in the WW contributions was the one from Mike McNair. It presented a political argument. It was a fantastically extrapolated version of Moshe

## WHERE WE STAND

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

We are also active among students and in many campaigns and alliances.

### We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

## Mike McNair: political dominance in the world

**T**here is a basic thing missing the arguments of the comrades of the AWL... The world is not composed of a flat system of states which are all equal to one another. The... inequality between these states is not purely economic...

There is politically constituted exploitation in the modern world. There are systematic hierarchical links between states... the dominance of one state over another state, dependency of one state on another state.

There is only one year post-1945 when British troops have not been in action, in counter-insurgency work overseas. Where have British troops been involved in counter-insurgency work overseas? Until the most recent stuff — and even to a certain extent now, in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan — in the former British colonies.

The same is true in relation to French troops. French troops have been deployed overseas for a great deal of the post-1945 period in former French colonies...

How that relates to this immediate question, an attack on Iran... The existence of the state of Israel is not at stake in the present situation. What is at stake in the present situation is a United States-led attack on Iran, primarily by air, which may use an Israeli attack as an excuse, a cover, the trigger. And it would be a US and British — the British air force would be deployed, dropping bunker-busters, and not just bunker-busters but cluster bombs etc., on Iranian cities.

This is about "do you support our state, the British state, in its war, its threatened war with Iran?"

**Left, John Bridge (theory) and right, Mark Fischer (practice).**

**Mark Fischer is the organiser of the WW group. He claimed that AWL's criticism of Hopi policy on nuclear weapons was based only on four words in the policy — that the Iranian people should defend themselves "by any means necessary" — completely ignoring the written discussion about the implications of the Hopi formula that the only "just" demand is for a "nuclear-free Middle East". (Think what it means when someone in Britain responds to the call for unilateral nuclear disarmament by Britain by saying that the only "just" demand is for a nuclear-free world).**

Machover's argument in his opening speech about Suez 1956 being a template for what's likely to happen now.

The world is pretty much the same as in the era of the high imperialism of 100 years ago — shaped by politico-military control by stronger states over weaker states. The USA is intent on destroying Iran (and the rest of the world, or just Iran? it's not clear); the British air force is certain to take part too; any Israeli raid on Iran could only be the trigger for that.

So the only war Iran will be involved in is one of resistance to this drive to wipe it out.

McNair referred sarcastically to "nasty Iran", as if only dupes of imperialism could really consider the Iranian regime "nasty". Machover had charged Sean Matgamna with "following the hysterical verbiage of Melanie Phillips about the mad mullahs", and made a similar sarcastic reference to "nasty Hezbollah". Yassamine Mather, while critical of the Iranian regime, protested against calling it "clerical-fascist", saying that workers were drawn to political Islam by real grievances.

Sean Matgamna, in his summing up, replied that all fascist movements know how to mobilise workers round real grievances; they are still fascist. Daniel Randall, from the floor, took up the "nasty Hezbollah" reference, arguing for a "third camp" (independent working-class) stance against imperialisms big and small.

That side of the debate, the "Iran side" so to speak,

nevertheless remained undeveloped here compared to the written debate.

The gist of the debate remained at two levels. In the basement, the WW's attempts to scandal-build, and AWL rebuttals. On the upper floor, a substantive debate on Israel-Palestine.

Sean Matgamna summed up. Moshe Machover had given the audience a series of stories about past misdeeds by Zionists. Yes: they're nationalists, and nationalists do such things. [This comment brought heckling and several minutes of uproar in the audience]. For example, in World War Two both left-wing and right-wing Irish nationalists allied with Nazis.

Matgamna was inclined to agree with Machover's narrowing-down of the "nation" involved here to the Israeli Jews, rather than a broader Jewish identity, but the fact is that the nation exists.

It cannot be shifted short of conquest and destruction. It cannot be shifted, for example, as a revolt of the Israeli working class. They will not dissolve the nation.

To propose a "solution" which makes a precondition of dissolving the Israeli Jewish nation is unjust, and it is also anti-Palestinian. The Palestinians have no possible better option than their own state, which can then evolve.

Israel is a bourgeois state. A particularly ruthless bourgeois state. We don't have to like it or what it does. But we have to have a democratic programme around which it can be possible to unite Jewish and Arab workers.

**Mike McNair: WW theorist**

## OBITUARY

# Irene Bruegel

**Irene Bruegel, a founder of Jews for Justice for Palestinians, died on 6 October, at the age of 62, as the result of a liver disease.**

We in AWL knew her mainly through our various efforts to construct a "two states" pole for solidarity with the Palestinians since 2000, when events in Israel-Palestine started spiralling into mutual reinforcement of Hamas and the Israeli right.

As we have seen from the changing pattern of the responses of passers-by at our many protests outside

the Israeli embassy over those years, that grim spiral has driven many people in Britain into concluding that the whole situation is a horrible mess which they're better off not thinking about.

On the left, many activists have adopted their own form of "not thinking about it" by rallying to Hamas, to "impossibilist" programmes, and to boycotts of Israel.

Elsewhere on the left, many academics said true things about how the university lecturers' union's

moves to boycott Israel were destructive of effective solidarity with the Palestinians, but were reluctant or sceptical about positive plans for real solidarity.

Irene's early political training had been in the SWP, now the most vocal supporters of Hamas, but she neither stopped thinking nor withdrew into scepticism.

She came to our protests sometimes; she discussed with us about how to build something bigger, though I think she found our forces too small for any of our schemes to be convincing.

As well as Jews for Justice for Palestine, she was involved in Faculty for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, a practical campaign against such things as the Israeli government's refusal to let students from Gaza attend universities in the West Bank which works in collaboration with democratic-minded Israeli academics.

The forces of hope and reason are a head shorter.  
*Martin Thomas*

**WILLIAM MORRIS**

# A Marxist for our times

William Morris is probably best known to most people these days as the creator of kitsch Victorian wallpaper designs. Morris was certainly a prominent nineteenth century artist, poet and all-round polymath, and it is impossible to do justice to the force of his personality.

However the Morris that should matter most to us, and the Morris that has most contemporary relevance is the man who shortly before his 50th birthday became an active revolutionary socialist and remained so to the end of his tumultuous life. Morris's Marxism and his prescient views on socialist ecology are the subjects of this appreciation by Paul Hampton.

**M**orris was born on 24 March 1834 in Walthamstow, then a village on the edge of Epping Forest to the north west of London. He was born into a wealthy middle class family who wanted him to join the church. Ever the dissident, he gave up Oxford University to take up art and poetry.

In 1861 he founded Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company, which did paintings, decoration, metal-work, stained glass, jewellery, sculpture and furniture for wealthy Victorians.

His political activity dated from the struggle to stop the Tory government going to war with Russia between 1876 and 1878. His "Appeal to the Working Men of England" (1877) blamed capitalists for the war and set him on the road via liberalism and radicalism to the socialist movement.

In January 1883 Morris joined the Democratic Federation, a small Radical group led by Henry Hyndman, which would soon become explicitly socialist (it became the Social Democratic Federation, SDF in August 1884). In November 1883 Morris spoke at Oxford University, scandalising the audience by calling on them to join the struggle against capitalism.

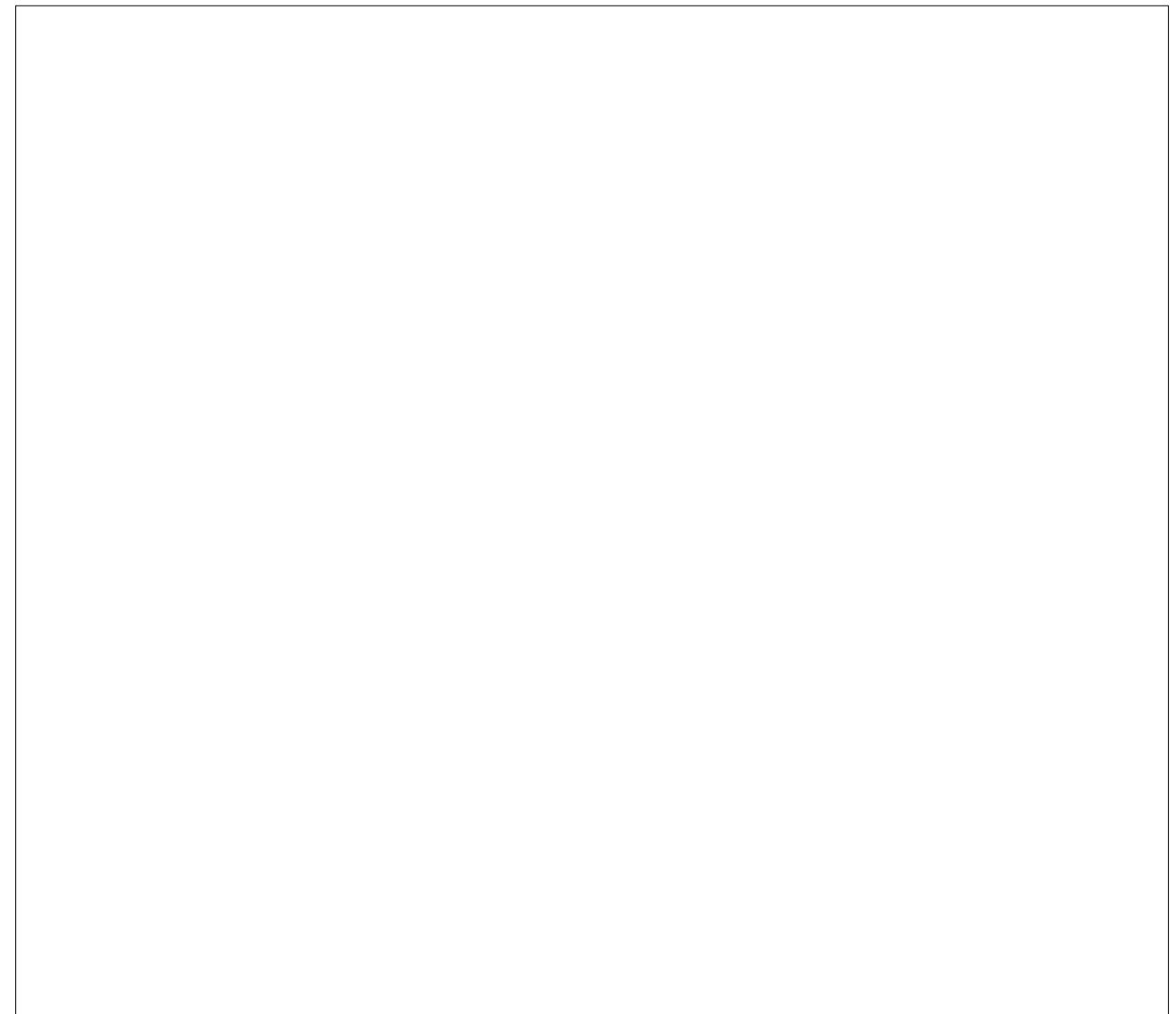
From then onwards Morris became a leading spokesperson for socialism as well as political journalist, publishing articles in the SDF paper *Justice*. However in December 1884 Morris, Eleanor Marx, Ernest Belfort Bax, Edward Aveling and others — fed up with Hyndman's dictatorial behaviour and jingoistic politics — resigned from the SDF. They set up the Socialist League and published the paper *Commonweal*.

The Socialist League was divided. Eleanor Marx, Aveling and Bax favoured standing candidates for parliament and local councils to advance socialist propaganda. Others, including Morris, opposed such parliamentary tactics. The radical anti-parliamentarians — anarchists — took over the Socialist League and marginalised Morris.

Morris and his close comrades in the Hammersmith branch eventually broke with the Socialist League at the end of 1890. He continued to work in the Hammersmith Socialist Society until ill health took its toll. He remained committed to socialism until the end, telling an American correspondent, "I have not

**From Thursday, 16 October — a study course on "The roots and history of British Trotskyism; the history, traditions, and ideas of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty". Introduced by Sean Matgamna. 1st, 3rd, and 5th Thursdays of each month, 7.30pm at The Plough, Museum St, London WC1. <http://www.workersliberty.org/history>**

To register for the course, email awl@workersliberty.org or phone 020 7207 3997. The registration charges (towards the cost of meeting rooms) are £10, £5 unwaged.



changed my mind on Socialism" in one of his last interviews, given in January 1896. (Paul Meier, *William Morris: The Marxist Dreamer*)

When William Morris died on 3 October 1896, apparently his doctor pronounced that the cause of death was "simply being William Morris and having done more work than most ten men".

**POLITICAL COMMITMENT**

**W**illiam Morris is perhaps unique in being claimed by almost everyone on the left as an inspiration. From Tony Blair to the old Communist Party of Great Britain, from Fabians to anarchists, Morris is held to have been an historic precursor.

However Morris was quite simply, as Edward Thompson put it, "an outstanding member of the first generation of European Communist intellectuals", on a par with Plekhanov or Labriola. (*William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, 1976) Not for nothing did Tom Mann recall nearly forty years after Morris' death that he "was to me the outstanding man among the intellectuals of the time" (*Daily Worker*, 24 March 1934).

Morris was probably the most active propagandist for socialism in Britain during the 1880s. He spoke at over one thousand meetings between 1883 and 1890, and may have been heard by as many as 250,000 people. In 1884 alone he wrote 34 articles for *Justice* and some 450 pieces for *Commonweal* newspaper, ranging from short news pieces to serials such as *Socialism from the Root Up* and *News from Nowhere* that eventually ran to book length. He also wrote for the socialist journal *Today*, published several socialist books and pamphlets, and wrote for the *Hammersmith Socialist Record* (1891-93). He edited over 400 copies of *Commonweal*, which published (largely funded by his fortune) as a monthly from February 1885 until April 1886 and then as a weekly until he was deposed as editor in May 1890. (Nicholas Salmon, *William Morris: Political Writings*, 1994)

In one of his first lectures after becoming a revolutionary socialist, Morris warned his audience what to

expect from such a commitment. In *Art and Socialism* (23 January 1884) he argued: "You will at least be mocked and laughed at by those whose mockery is a token of honour to an honest man... You will run the risk of losing position, reputation, money, friends even: losses which are certainly pin pricks to the serious martyrdom I have spoken of... Nor can I assure you that you will forever escape scot-free from the attacks of open tyranny... So on all sides I can offer you a position which involves sacrifice..."

Nevertheless he urged "those of you who are convinced of the justice of our cause, not to hang back from active participation in a struggle". Morris saw himself primarily as a propagandist for socialism, with the intention of "making Socialists" — convincing and educating a layer of socialists through open air meetings, lectures, socialist newspapers and books.

He summed up his attitude in *Commonweal*, 10 November 1888: "Agitate! Educate! Organise! Agitate, that the workers may be stirred and awakened to a sense of their position. Educate, that they may know the reason of the evils that they suffer. Organise, that we and they may overthrow the system that bears us down and makes us what we are; that there may be no futile waste of individual effort, but that the army of the revolution may move forward united, steadfast and irresistible, 'the the Freedom of the Peoples and the Brotherhood of Man'." (Salmon, *William Morris: Journalism*)

**ON CAPITALISM AND CLASS STRUGGLE**

**I**n a number of significant respects, in his understanding of capitalism and class struggle, on the working class as the agent of its own emancipation, on the state and revolution, and on what socialism and communism would look like, Morris was a pretty orthodox follower of Marx and Engels.

Morris understood capitalism in Marxist terms, as a class society, but also as a system that prepared the ground for socialism. In another lecture early in his socialist life, *Art and Labour* (1 April 1884) he para-

phrased the *Communist Manifesto*:

"[Capitalism] has strengthened and solidified the working class, has collected them into factories and great towns, has forced them to act together to a certain extent by the trades unions, and has given them a certain amount of political power: what they need now to enter on the last stage of the modern revolution of labour is that they should understand their true position... when they understand that they themselves can regulate labour, and by being absolute masters of their material, tools, and time they can win for themselves all that is possible to be won from nature without deduction or taxation paid to classes that have no purpose or reason for existence; when this is understood, the workers will find themselves compelled to combine together to change the basis of Society and to realise that Socialism the rumour of whose approach is all about us. (Eugene Lemire, *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*)

Morris read *Capital* and understood its importance of socialists. Looking back in his article, *How I Became a Socialist*, 16 June 1894, he explained about his own Marxist education. "Well, having joined a Socialist body (for the Federation soon became definitely Socialist), I put some conscience into trying to learn the economical side of Socialism, and even tackled Marx, though I must confess that, whereas I thoroughly enjoyed the historical part of *Capital*, I suffered agonies of confusion of the brain over reading the pure economics of that great work. Anyhow, I read what I could, and will hope that some information stuck to me from my reading; but more, I must think, from continuous conversation with such friends as Bax and Hyndman and Scheu." (A L Morton, *Political Writings of William Morris*, 1973 p.242)

He understood that "the basis on which 'Society' is built, to wit, [is] the safe and continuous expansion of the exploitation of Labour by Capital." (*Commonweal*, 7 August 1886)

In the Manifesto of the Socialist League (February 1885) he argued that, "the conflict between the [classes] is ceaseless. Sometimes it takes the form of open rebellion, sometimes of strikes, sometimes of mere widespread mendicancy and crime; but it is always going on in one form or other, though it may not always be obvious to the thoughtless looker-on." (Salmon)

From that position, Morris believed that the working class was the central social agent of change and that it was the job of socialists to help raise up the labour movement and make workers self-conscious of their condition and interests.

#### **WORKING CLASS SELF-EMANCIPATION**

The theme of working class self-emancipation runs through his writings. As the constitution of the Socialist League put it: "the liberation of the workers will be brought about by the workers themselves". (Meier)

Introducing the first issue of *Commonweal*, February 1885, Morris wrote: "Lastly, a word of appeal, to the workers chiefly. It is not only that whatever we say is professedly directly in their interest: much more it is that through them alone, through the slaves of society, we look for its regeneration, for its elevation from its present corruption and misery." (Salmon 1994 p.82)

In a lecture entitled, *Monopoly; or, How Labour is Robbed* (20 February 1887) he argued that "it is the workers themselves that must bring about the change". In *Common-Sense Socialism*, a review in *Commonweal* (18 June 1887), he chastised the author for being "incapable of conceiving of the class-struggle, or the historical evolution of industrialism, or of understanding that the real point at issue is when and how the workers shall emerge from their condition of pupilage and be masters of their own destinies." (Salmon)

Morris retained this idea even as his political organisation fell apart. As he put it in the *Daily Chronicle* (10 November 1893): "'By us, and not for us', must be their motto". (A. Briggs, *William Morris, Selected Writings and Designs*)

Hal Draper, in his seminal study, *The Two Souls of Socialism* (1966), championed the conception of socialism from below, i.e. of socialism as essentially the self-emancipation of the working class. He described Morris as "the leading personality of revolutionary socialism in that period". He argued that "Morris' writings on socialism breathe from every pore the spirit of Socialism-from-Below" and are "pervaded with his emphasis from every side on class struggle from below, in the present; and in the future."

Draper was absolutely right. It was working class self-liberation that demarcated Morris from most of his contemporaries and places him centrally within the real Marxist tradition.

#### **OBAMA**

# A ruling-class politician

party, and he's also the candidate the trade union bureaucracy including the ILWU have supported, but Obama is cut from the same cloth as all the other standard bearers of the Democratic Party.

He has already said, he's not going to withdraw troops from Iraq and that the major draw-down of troops will start two years from now.

Four years ago at the Democratic Convention, Obama said that the USA should attack Iran if they were attempting to develop nuclear capability, and at the Apec, the Zionist lobby group, a couple of weeks ago he re-iterated his ardent support for Israel and called for Jerusalem to be the sole capital of the Zionist state, shunning the Palestinians altogether; on Cuba he initially said that he would meet with anyone, now he says that he would sit down with the Cuban government on condition that the Gusanos, the right wing Cuban reactionaries, were also present, and that's just not going to happen.

On the black question he has said very little; in terms of being the great black hope, I suppose a lot of blacks, and not just blacks, believe that he is going to bring change, but it's clear from his remarks and how he has voted he's a traditional capitalist politician and not even that liberal.

In the state of Georgia there will be a primary with a black liberal woman, Regina Thomas, running against a white conservative, John Barrell, who is conservative and pro-war. Obama supports Barrell. The trade union bureaucracy will support Obama. The workers don't need him.

#### **WHAT LABOUR NEEDS**

What labor needs to do is to build a working class party to begin to organise actions independent of the government like the ones we did around the Iraq war. Laying the basis for a political separation from the capitalist parties. When I run for the union I stand for an independent working-class party based on a class struggle programme, but it's never really been successful. So what kind of a party needs to be built in the USA?

We don't need the kind of a labour party that you have in Britain, that enforces anti-union legislation, that supports imperialist wars like Iraq and Afghanistan, or like they have in Brazil, they are throwing peasants off the land, they support Nafta, they support free trade and privatisation, which the Liverpool dockers were up against a few years ago — it is in the concrete that the character of the party is determined.

The kind of workers' party we need in the USA is a revolutionary party, like that which made the revolution in Russia, of Lenin and Trotsky. And that might sound far-fetched but workers are being oppressed throughout the capitalist world. Some people were cynical that there could even be strikes against the war. By reaching to workers where they are now we can start to raise the class consciousness of the workers.

The ILWU really became a force within the labor movement based on the 1934 strike, when all ports on the west coast were on strike and there was a general strike in San Francisco. A large part of the leadership of that strike came from the Communist Party. The politics of our union came from the Stalinists of that time. In 1995 there was a founding conference of a Labor Party in the USA; we attempted to intervene on the basis of a labor party that would fight on a programme in the working class. But it was an idea that dried on the vine, in large part because the trade union bureaucracy in the USA is joined at the hip with the Democrats and they will do whatever they can to stop an independent working class movement in the US.

Barack Obama is not the first black to run for the President of the USA; when I was a college student, the SWP, which was a Trotskyist party, in 1964 ran a black candidate called Clinton DuBarry. That is the only time I voted for a presidential candidate in the USA.

But Obama is the first [black] candidate of a major

#### **IMMIGRATION CONTROLS**

# Unions and immigration officials

It is obviously welcome as Robin Sivapalan reports (*Solidarity* 3/139) that the campaign against immigration controls is being taken into the trade union movement, given the way these laws are used against the struggles of migrant workers on the Tube and elsewhere. However the fact that the campaign will be meeting with PCS members in the Borders Agency needs expanding on. The Socialist Party-led group executive in the Department for Work and Pensions should be calling on members to refuse to check the national insurance numbers of migrant workers on behalf of the bosses. But what about PCS members who are immigration officials?

The difference between these two groups of workers is clear. Whereas we would radically reform the benefits system administered by PCS members in DWP, the

only answer to immigration controls is to scrap them and the jobs of those who enforce them. It is impossible to issue an appeal to these PCS members to stop carrying out raids and deportations: that's their job!

It is another indictment of the "left leadership" of PCS that they allow these people to remain members, never mind refusing to criticise what they do. That they concentrate on the sectional interests of these workers for electoral advantage against the right-wing in the union exposes their claim to be Marxists and makes them just as much an obstacle to the campaign against immigration controls as the scab Immigration Services Union they hypocritically condemn.

Matthew Thompson



# WORKERS' LIBERTY & SOLIDARITY

## Let the peoples of Iraq decide on Iraq's oil

BY COLIN FOSTER

**O**n 13 October the Iraqi government, at a meeting in London with bosses of 34 international oil companies, opened an auction for 20-year contracts to develop big swathes of Iraqi oil and gas fields.

Bids will be submitted over the coming months, and the Iraqi government plans to award contracts in mid 2009. It will also open a second bidding round, on further oil and gas fields, in December 2008.

We don't know the terms of the contracts. More to the point, neither do the peoples of Iraq.

The deep-rooted opposition in Iraq to oil privatisation, spearheaded by the oil workers' unions, has had an impact. The Iraqi government has long been trying, under US pressure, to push through a comprehensive new oil law, allowing for large-scale privatisation. The law will not pass any time soon. The Iraqi government is resorting to makeshifts under existing law; the question is, how much of the radical privatisation programme will it try to sneak through via the makeshifts.

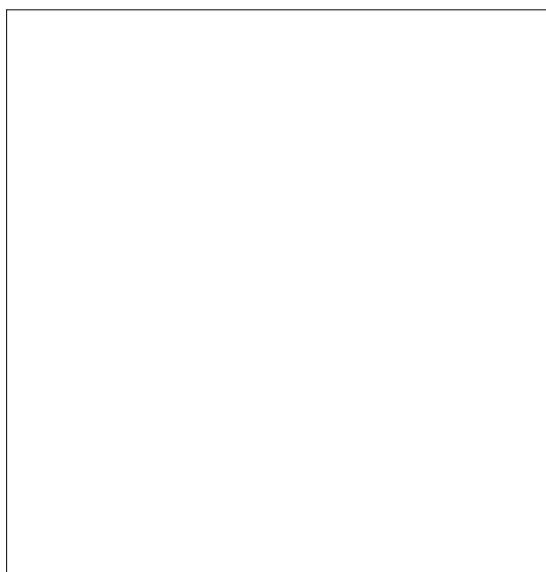
"Hands Off Iraqi Oil" reports: "According to the Ministry's claims, [these] are service contracts. If that is true, they would be comparable at least to contracts in Venezuela and Iran, rather than giving such a large share of ownership, control and revenues as the production sharing contracts the companies wanted; but still giving away more than in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, where foreign companies do not manage a whole field, but are just contracted to install a piece of technology, for example..."

"It is hard to say [however] because so far there has been absolutely no transparency, and no-one knows what the terms of the contracts are. The priority now in Iraq has to be for these terms to be disclosed — the issues are too important to be decided in secret".

With the auction, the Baghdad government is giving another signal of the increasing confidence it has shown in recent months. Presumably at least some of the oil company bosses buy into that confidence — they wouldn't bid for contracts with the Maliki government unless they thought it likely to last a while.

This is a government which keeps Saddam Hussein's anti-union laws in place; which keeps Decree 8750 from 2005, authorising the government to seize all union funds; and which responded to an oil workers' strike in June 2007 by sending in troops and threatening to arrest union leaders.

It is a coalition government of Shia clerical-fascists of various sorts, Kurdish warlord parties, and minor Sunni Islamist groups. It was elected, but elected on a communal head-count in condi-



Oil workers protest at the oil ministry in Baghdad, May 2007

tions of simmering communal civil war.

The right to self-determination for the peoples of Iraq must mean the right to decide freely on the development of the country's major natural resource, and the right to have a democratic constitution, with a labour law guaranteeing trade union rights.

The Maliki government is taking a harder line with the USA. After rejecting the "State of Forces

Agreement" that the USA wanted, it is still toughing out negotiations over a temporary "security agreement" for US troops to remain after their UN mandate expires on 31 December 2008.

But being tougher against the USA could go with being "tougher" against Iraqi workers, and "tougher" about contracting-out Iraq's natural resources.

It remains very possible that the newly confident Maliki government will overreach itself. On 1 October it took over control of 100,000 members of the Sahwa militias, Sunni militias enticed away from the "resistance" by the Americans by long negotiations.

Until 1 October the Sahwa militiamen were paid \$300 a month, a good wage by Iraqi standards, by the USA. Now the Iraqi government is due to pay them a comparable stipend, but integrate only 20% of them into the army and police. The others have been promised other government jobs, or training for a trade. But the Maliki government also says it may prosecute some Sahwa leaders for alleged sectarian crimes. A blow-up between these Sunni militiamen and the Shia-dominated government could plunge Iraq back into open communal civil war.

A democratic, secular movement from below, spearheaded by the Iraqi labour movement, is needed to bring real self-determination to the peoples of Iraq, free from foreign troops, sectarian militias, and profit-gouging by multinationals.

## Solidarity defeats victimisation on London Underground

In the last issue of *Solidarity*, we reported how London Underground infrastructure contractor Metronet was attempting to victimise RMT rep Andy Littlechild. Following the threat of strikes, the union has won the dispute, with Andy keeping his job and his grade.

This is doubtless due to the strong response from his workmates, who immediately balloted for strike action and made their support for Andy clear. Metronet knew they were facing the prospect of a massive Yes vote and effective strike action that could have coincided with the bus workers' strike on 22 October.

RMT balloted the whole of its Metronet membership, not just Andy's own workplace, and kicked off the ballot as soon as he was suspended rather than waiting for him to be sacked. This is in contrast to other anti-victimisation campaigns, where action has been kept more local and has taken time to get off the ground, thus making the union appear weaker. Perhaps in those other cases, it was not possible to do more, but Andy's case shows that the more decisive the action, the better chance of winning.

However, the issues of PPE and management thinking they can rewrite risk assessments are still with us; the union must assert its right to defend its members' safety and rights at work.

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